

THESIS SUBJECT

THE THEOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS
OF
WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING

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of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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Williams, A.B., B.Th., S.T.M., Oneida, New York.

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DEDICATED

to my wife
for her
encouragement
and
inspiration.

PREFACE

The object of this thesis is to examine the teachings of William Ellery Channing. Channing's work in the cause of religion was not confined to the speculative for he was active in humanitarian reforms. Thus, after an examination of his theological principles, we shall consider the practical application of his religious convictions in his teachings pertaining to war and peace, temperance, the elevation of the poor, and slavery.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the Auburn Theological Seminary for the award of the Maxwell travelling fellowship which made possible my study at Edinburgh.

I wish also to mention my good fortune in having had the supervision and inspiration of that noble mind and Christian spirit, the late Dr. Hugh R. Mackintosh.

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THE THEOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS

OF

WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING

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THE THEOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS
OF
WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING
INTRODUCTION

The scope of this thesis is to estimate the Theological and Religious teachings of the Reverend William Ellery Channing, D.D. First, we shall consider his early environment and training; secondly, his contribution to the cause of liberal theological thinking and lastly, his humanitarian labors and ethical teachings which were motivated by his religious convictions.

William Ellery Channing was born at Newport, Rhode Island, on the 7th. of April 1780. He was graduated from Harvard College in 1798 after four years of study. Then followed two years of residence as a tutor in the home of a family of wealth in Richmond, Virginia. Returning northward, he was regent at Harvard College for a short period. During this time he received calls from two churches

to become their Pastor. Finally he accepted the call from the Congregation of the Federal St. Church, much the smaller of the two. He served as Pastor of this Church throughout his lifetime.

CHAPTER 1

HIS EARLY ENVIRONMENT AND TRAINING

Should one visit Newport, the city of Channing's birth, today, one would be impressed with the monuments of Channing the city contains and the general atmosphere of reverence with which the memory of Channing is held. To the tourist the beautiful Channing Memorial church and the statue of Dr. Channing which stands opposite the Church in Touro Park are the chief reasons for visiting Newport. The city today is America's most famous summer home of the aristocracy. But there, surrounded by luxurious hotels and homes, in the center of one of the greatest concentrations of material wealth in the world, where vast numbers of the famous moguls of millions seek diversion and peace, the influence of Channing somehow manages to transcend all these material barriers and lives on in the full glory of spiritual fame.

Newport will never change. It is hemmed in by the sea and to look out upon it from any of the promontories about the town is an artist's dream indeed. But its unchangeableness is maintained by a more material though no less beautifying guardian.

Miles and miles of the most exclusive estates, which the world may admire but never enter, impregnably safeguard the city from assaults of man or time. The visitor to Newport has no difficulty finding the statue of Dr. Channing. Were there difficulty almost any person one happened to meet could supply the information. The statue was presented to the city by Mr. William G. Weld of Boston in 1893 and is the work of William Clarke Noble. It stands in the Park directly opposite the Memorial Church. If the visitor is fortunate enough to have the caretaker as a guide, he will have an interesting afternoon indeed. People who have travelled at all are accustomed to the mechanical recitals of those who through their much telling have acquired the accent of truth and authority. Not so with the keeper of Channing Memorial Church. The fine grain of the porphyritic granite of which the church is built is pointed out with pride. It seems that the supply of this particular grade of granite was exhausted before the church was completed so it was finished with another grade of stone. The gown Channing used to wear is taken carefully from its case. It had been sent to relatives in England after his death but is now back to hold an honored place in the church.

On rare occasions some visiting minister is privileged to try it on. It is a privilege restricted of course to those not large of stature. Various books and pictures are discussed with the familiarity of close friendship. Then with a sense of expectancy you enter the auditorium itself. Nor are you disappointed. All is silent. The guide makes no sound but seems to be sharing and enjoying the feeling and thoughts of one seeing it for the first time. After a while you ask a question and then you hear the story. Each window has its own. It is not enough to tell the history of each one. Our guide would have you see the quality, the beauty, the little points that are peculiarly characteristic of each. In one a child's face almost lifts one up, in another the coloring of the robe is something not of this earth alone. Likewise the pulpit, pews and pillars become animate as our guide gives them life. Often his story is interrupted when overcome with emotion he cannot continue. Much of it still remains to be told as you leave the church when the day ends. One has a sense of having been very near the spirit of Channing; a light the passing of years has not dimmed nor yet revealed the full story of its influence.

This beautiful Memorial Church at Newport was made possible by the generosity of Unitarians in that city, aided by the friends of Dr. Channing the world over. The corner stone was laid in 1880, on the hundreth anniversary of his birth, and the services of dedication were held October 10, 1881.

The house in which Channing was born still stands at the corner of School and Mary Streets, and is now used as a Children's Home. It is only a short distance from the Church and is marked by a tablet. William Ellery Channing, the third child of William Channing and Lucy Ellery, was born in this house on the 7th. of April, 1780. William became a member of a large family circle, there were nine brothers and sisters in all. Descriptions we read of him give us a picture of a child with more than ordinary beauty of feature and form. As a boy he was well able to hold his own with his playmates. He particularly enjoyed the sport of wrestling, indulging in it until through college. He was most active, daring, and quick of hand and foot. One can imagine him taking full joy in the sports that the boys of his age enjoyed. His parents forbade his entering the water so his regard for their wishes prevented his learning to swim. One could scarce imagine a greater physical contrast

then Channing as a boy and as a man. He is another outstanding example, of which history furnishes us so many, of the perfectly good spiritual principle of self-denial wrongly applied. But we shall speak of this more fully later. In all respects but the physical one, the child was father of the man. He was a champion of fair play among his playmates. In fact he seemed to have most of the commendable qualities which seem to follow as a matter of course once a person catches the idea of thinking of the other fellow first. Naturally such a course wins many friends and these Channing always had throughout his life. His biographers have given us pictures of his boyhood for which we are indebted and to which nothing can be added now except to draw conclusions from them in the light of Channing's later principles.

Young William was blessed with a most excellent father and mother. On his mother's side the Ellerys were of good sense and simplicity but withal intelligent and cultured. William Ellery was graduated at Harvard in 1747 and became a successful merchant at Newport. He became a member of the Congress of 1776 and so was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. He possessed a remarkable youthfulness until his death at the age of ninety-three. His wife,

Ann Remington, made him a most excellent and homely helpmate until he was deprived of her society by her death at the age of thirty-nine.

The Channings arrived in Boston in 1712 in the person of John Channing who married soon after his arrival. The Channings were an energetic, dignified family. William Channing was born at Newport, June 11, 1751; was graduated at Princeton in 1769 and became a lawyer at Newport. He rose to become District Attorney for the district of Rhode Island. He married Lucy Ellery, the daughter of William Ellery, in 1777. These were the parents to whom William Ellery Channing was born in 1780. William's father was a respected and able lawyer. The support of his large family kept him separated somewhat from close relationship with his children. He was a fluent speaker, sometimes described as "mellifluous" and vehement. Socially he was a good mixer, of an amiable and benevolent disposition. He was an honest temperate man, kind, and always ready to help the poor. He was a faithful attendant at church and one of its strong supporters. His religious attitude was liberal. He was tolerant and respectful of other denominations though he himself was a faithful Congregationalist. Both father and mother were religious. Channing's mother is spoken

of as a sturdy person outstanding in her sincerity and simplicity. All that appeared to be worthy received a straightforward and cordial reception. But if she detected anything deceitful she became bluntly severe. She had a clear insight into the character of others and was certainly not a person to be imposed upon. To her children she gave of her affection without stint and with fullest joy. Though young William's youth was shadowed by the loss of his father at the early age of twelve, his mother's high hopes for him and her loving presence for more than fifty years was a mutual blessing.

Though our purpose is to study the principles which were the fruitage of Channing's mature years still it is conducive to a clearer understanding of those principles to know something of their seedtime in his early years. The Channing children were sent to school at an early age because of their mother's uncertain health, so William early came under the rigid, though not unjust, system for the training of the young, that prevailed in the public schools. He seems to have been considered a model pupil by his teachers. His improvement as a pupil was steady. Though not brilliant in his studies, he was an understanding and thoughtful student, sufficiently so, that his parents were quite proud, his father saying on occasion,

"We expect much from our son William, and flatter ourselves that we shall not be disappointed."¹

The regard in which he was held by his young companions is shown by the answer given to the teacher when one day she said to an unruly pupil, "'I wish in my heart you were like William Channing.' 'Oh,' exclaimed the poor child, 'I can't be like him; it is not half so hard for him to be good as it is for me.'"² His goodness was a manly type respected by his companions. Even in his early years we discern that strength of character tempered with gentleness that enabled him in later years to speak the truth in love as though he did not know the meaning of fear.

One would search widely to find an example of home training bearing better fruit than in the life of William Ellery Channing. From his mother came that diligence, determination, vigorous honesty and studious thoroughness, qualities which were the very stepping stones of his ascent to fame. From his father, though he died when Channing was but twelve, there was imparted to his life, a cheerfulness of disposition, a gentle serenity of spirit and diplomatic powers that were to make for him a host of friends even among those who differed

¹ William Henry Channing, "Memoir of William Ellery Channing.", Volume 1, p. 27.

² Ibid., p. 24

with his views. It is recorded of his father that when the tranquillity of their domestic affairs, for some reason, was disturbed, he would quietly take a hand by saying, "Do not trouble yourself Lucy, I will make all smooth."¹ So young William early learned the efficacy of gentleness. This combination of qualities, imparted to him by his parents, assimilated and reflected by his maturing personality, produced that magnanimity of mind and spirit which is no small part of the abiding charm of Channing.

For a boy to grow up amid the religious conditions prevailing in Channing's day was a problem indeed. Especially so when a boy by nature was inclined to take what was taught him seriously. Though not by nature controversial, he was forced because of his own inherent honesty to differ from the gloomy picture of life painted by the theological teachers of his time and so was destined to become the leader in the greatest religious revolt in American history. A familiar story of Channing's early religious experience is worth our repeating here as it bears out this thought. One day he was taken by his father to hear a famous preacher who was preaching in the neighborhood.

"Impressed with the notion that he might learn great tidings from the unseen world, he listened

¹Ibid., p. 27.

attentively to the sermon. With glowing rhetoric, the lost state of man was described, his abandonment to evil, helplessness, dependence upon sovereign grace, and the need of earnest prayer as the condition of receiving this divine aid. In the view of the speaker, a curse seemed to rest upon the earth, and darkness and horror to veil the face of nature. William, for his part, supposed that henceforth those who believed would abandon all other things to seek this salvation, and that amusement and earthly business would no longer occupy a moment. The service over, they went out of the Church, and his father, in answer to the remark of some person, said decisively, - 'Sound doctrine, Sir.' 'It is all true, then,' was his inward reflection. A heavy weight fell on his heart. He wanted to speak to his father; he expected his father would speak to him in relation to this tremendous crisis of things. They got into the chaise and rode along, but, absorbed in awful thoughts, he could not raise his voice. Presently his father began to whistle! At length they reached home; but instead of calling the family together and telling them of the appalling intelligence which the preacher had given, his father took off his boots, put his feet toward the fireplace, and quietly read a newspaper. All things went on as usual. At first, he was surprised; but not being given to talking, he asked no explanations. Soon, however, the question arose, - 'Could what he had heard be true? No! his father did not believe it; people did not believe it! It was not true!' He felt he had been trifled with; that the preacher had deceived him."¹

This incident was a disturbing but fruitful lesson as to the worth of sincerity both in the pulpit and in the pew.

However in most respects we find that his boyhood was healthy and normal. Apart from the stimulating influences of his mother and father there were outside forces. Many prominent men of the day visited his

¹Ibid., pp. 34-35.

home. Washington once dined there. Dr. Stiles, one of the great scholars of the time, preached at Newport. Later he became president of Yale College. He, and later Dr. Hopkins, who for many years preached at Newport, were mighty influences upon his early life, planting seeds which in later years appeared as deep-rooted convictions. There was also in Newport, a Baptist preacher, called Father Thurston who was most zealous in behalf of temperance. No doubt he influenced William to form an opinion against the vice of drunkenness, very common at the time in Newport.

We find young Channing early exemplifying qualities of thoughtfulness, courage and leadership. He delighted to lead others. He was called "The Peacemaker" and "The Little Minister" because of his pacifying abilities and sweetness of disposition. When very young he would assemble the family or a group of his playmates, arrange them as a congregation and discourse to them with greatest seriousness.

"External aids were useful, however, in unfolding William's religious nature, only because it was so rich in high, generous, conscientious feeling. He was remarkable, from the first, for purity and self-command, and for an air of dignity, which abashed the frivolousness of rude companions and guarded him from the familiarities of less delicate spirits. And it was well that conscience was thus early quickened, and that this mantle of modesty was wrapped about him; for, to use his own words, there was then, 'A corruption of morals among those of my own age, which made boyhood a critical and perilous season.'"¹

¹Ibid., p. 35.

Even as a boy Channing combined qualities of courage and fearlessness with idealism and compassion. On one occasion when a gang of his chums had carried on a period of bickering and hostility with a group from another part of the city he advocated meeting them and settling it once and for all. Thus early we find him possessing courage and leadership. Another anecdote of his boyhood is that he did much to throw light on the folly of superstition, when as a mere boy he offered to spend a night on an old ship lying in the harbor which was commonly believed to be haunted. In later years one of Channing's strongest beliefs was in the inherent goodness of man. He was an idealist at heart. This showed itself in his boyhood temperament. How often the trait of idealism is fostered by the character of one's early habits. Nothing nurtures idealism more than loneliness with time to think hugely, to build grand castles in the air. We can imagine Channing with a dog or a kite or perhaps a book going to some high hill commanding a far-reaching panorama, or seeking some favorite spot in a quiet forest to be alone with his thoughts. Of course, for a boy of his temperament, life wasn't just a dream but was often a thing of bitterness and conflict. According to his own words, he "....Owed

the tone of his character more to the influences of solitary thought than of companionship."¹ When we think of the victorious spirit of the later Channing, these words puzzle us until we consider that they are usually true when the spirit of high and beautiful idealism faces the realism and brutal facts of life.

He often said that, "....He understood the happiness of childhood rather from observation than experience, that his early life was sad, that conscious want of virtue and knowledge then depressed him, that friendship seemed tame and cold, that life looked desolate, and that every year had been brighter to him than the last. But this seriousness was only the shadow of melancholy that early comes over children of ideal temper, when first the shock of contrast is felt between hope and existing facts, and from dreams of Eden youth wakes in the desert; when reverence is forced to see that the best earthly friends can fail, and conscience reveals a host of inward foes; when chivalrous honor, cherished in fancy, is confronted with actual meanness; when life presents itself as a long series of struggles or compromises, and enthusiasm holds parley with prudence, and the saddened spirit seeks, in religious aspirations, poetic vision, and communion with nature's order and freshness, solace and strength. Out of such discords, the earnest learn, as he did, to draw harmonies which make after life a hymn of praise and a triumphal march. He was testing the wealth of the inward world entrusted to his regency, learning the obligations of duty, and arming himself with love for the conquest of evil. These retiring habits did not make him morose, but taught him self-respect, the courage to deny temptation, distaste for the trivial and vulgar, and loftiness of aim."²

Anyone who has watched a bird lay her eggs in a nest in the field, and then followed the tiny birds in their growth from day to day cannot help but share

¹Ibid., p. 36.

²Ibid., p. 36

Channing's feelings when as a young lad this experience illustrates his sympathy and sensitiveness towards all created things. In one of his letters written soon after he left college, he says,

"I can remember an incident in my childhood which has given a turn to my whole life and character. I found a nest of birds in my father's field, which held four young ones. They had no down when I first discovered them. They opened their little mouths as though they were hungry and I gave them some crumbs which were in my pocket. Every day I returned to feed them. As soon as school was done, I would run home for some bread and sit by the nest to see them eat, for an hour at a time. They were now feathered and almost ready to fly. When one morning I found them all cut up into quarters. The grass round the nest was wet with blood....The mother was on a tree and the father on a wall mourning for their young. I cried, myself, for I was a child.I can never forget my feelings. The impression will never be worn away, nor can I ever cease to abhor every species of inhumanity towards inferior animals."¹

When William was twelve years old he was sent to his uncle's home in New London to prepare for college. Shortly after, his father died leaving him with a deep sense of loss and a desire to fit himself as soon as possible to aid his mother in supporting herself and her family of nine. His wish to do all he could gave him a seriousness beyond his years. His stay at his uncle's home seems to have been a most pleasant and profitable period. He was a loved and respected member of the household and deservedly so. The Rev. Henry

¹Ibid., p. 39.

Channing had been long settled at New London. Though New England was then in the grip of a gloomy, stern Calvinism, Rev. Channing was of a liberal religious attitude. Then, too, it was a time of moving spiritual revivals and the combination of these influences made a real impression upon young William. At the very beginning of his interest in religion, he was under the influences of one who imparted to him that free and liberal spirit which he was later so fully to express.

Channing entered Harvard College in 1794. His class numbered such worthy names as Judge Story, William Williams, Artemas Sawyer, Joseph Emerson and Dr. Tuckerman. In later years Judge Story writes of Channing as he knew him in college,

"I do not believe he had a single personal enemy during that whole period and I am sure that he never deserved to have any. We were proud of his distinctions and gratified when he was praised.....Speaking for myself, I can truly say, that the qualities of mind and character, which then were unfolded to my own view, were precisely the same which in after life gave him such celebrity."¹

While in college he easily excelled all his fellows by his special gifts for written composition, not only evidenced in the classroom but in various clubs of which he became an important member. It seems that this achievement was developed by the strictest

¹Ibid., pp. 52-53.

efforts. His first efforts were rough and unpolished. What a comfort this thought to those, who after faltering miserably in their first attempts at public address are inclined to give up and seek some less terrifying means of livelihood. In college, Channing studied rhetoric and elocution. He practised the art of thinking on his feet while taking walks or going to and from his college appointments. It was the custom, as it is still in many college societies, to have a written discourse read and then discussed by members of the society. Channing's efforts were outstanding both as reader and as critic. The influence of these societies cannot be overestimated in the widening of his interests in questions of the time, the broadening of his social interests, the deepening of his friendships and the sharpening of his desire for higher attainment. He was more interested in history, philosophy and politics than in mathematics. He read carefully such writers as Priestley, Locke and Price. He had a high regard for Price who gave him the Doctrine of Ideas as a foundation for his philosophical thinking. He believed that Price was one of the first influences upon the German mind in the transcendental direction.

Through his college studies he received the

incentive to moral and social reform. He acquired that capacity of disinterested affection which later colored his religious and theological thinking. In college, there began a progressive series of experiences, deeply spiritual in nature, which lifted him to mystic heights of personal consecration. Thus early his enthusiasm flamed to be used for humanity and God. With his natural powers of intellect and eloquence everyone believed he would choose law as his profession. It was a subject that gave him considerable concern. He thought of several possible professions, but to them all he said, "I think there is a wider sphere for usefulness and honor in the ministry."¹ In his senior year he writes, "The prevalence of infidelity, imported from France, led me to inquire into the evidences of Christianity, and then I found for what I was made."²

It is with reluctance that we must pass on, having made only such brief references, to Channing's college experiences. What days of realization and joy they were! What rewarding experiences were his! In college he grew into a man, widened in outlook, well-stored intellectually, and deepened of spiritual

¹Ibid., p. 73.

²Ibid., p. 73.

discernment. When he was graduated in 1798 the honor of giving the closing oration fell to him. Channing's college course, like the rest of his life, makes an inspiring study. One cannot help feeling how well he did it. It is with expectancy that we await the unfolding of his later years.

Those of us who have made strong attachments in those carefree, joyous associations at college, only to have them almost completely severed after graduation festivities are over, find ourselves in a reminiscent mood as we respond to these pensive words in a letter written to a friend from his home in Newport.

"O William! the memory of those days will be ever fresh within me. It has drawn many tears down my cheek....My walks now are solitary; no friendly voice to cheer me; no congenial soul to make a partner of my joy or sorrow. I am, indeed, in the midst of my family, with the best of mothers, brothers, and sisters. But, alas! I have no friend. There is a beach about a mile from town. I never saw elsewhere such magnificence, grandeur, and sublimity, as the wild scenery of nature here presents. The towering and craggy rocks, the roar of the waves, the foam with which they dash on the shore, their irregular succession, and the boundless ocean before, all contribute to inspire one with awe and delight. Here I go once a day. Sometimes I compare my fortunes to the billows before me. I extend my arms towards them, I run to meet them and wish myself buried beneath their waters. Sometimes my whole soul ascends to the God of nature, and in such a temple I cannot but be devout. Thus I am either borne to heaven on 'rapture's wings of fire' or else I am plunged into the depths of despair. How different from my situation at college! There I had friends to fly to, when the world looked gloomy, and forgot my miseries in the circle of my equals. Here I brood over melancholy."¹

¹Ibid., p. 77.

Channing has resolved to be a minister, "....A shepherd of the flock of Jesus, a reformer of a vicious, and an instructor of an ignorant world."¹ Already he is learning something of the social isolation of the clergy.

Upon finishing his college course, he returned to Newport but soon began to look for some means of self-support. It chanced that a David Meade Randolph who was visiting the city desired a tutor for his children and was favorably impressed with Channing's qualifications and offered him the place. So in October of 1789, he left for Richmond to become a part of Mr. Randolph's household. Channing liked Virginia and the Virginians. There he came into direct contact with the curse of slavery which depressed him very much. The Randolph family held slaves but sought by kindness to reconcile them to their lot. Channing, when the family was absent on brief visits, was left in charge of the whole household. He was interested in knowing the slaves and would frequently visit their quarters. In the South also, he came into direct contact with the Democrats. Always ready for a free and spirited discussion and

¹Ibid., p.78.

being strongly Federalist in his political sentiment, he early found that it was well to have grounds for one's opinion or keep his feelings to himself. His views were enlarged. Prejudice and bigotry gave way to candor and reason. He developed a broad-mindedness and many-sidedness which we often note in the later Channing. Thereafter action was always the fruit of sober reflection rather than impulse. In a letter to his friend, Shaw, he says,

"I view the world as a wide field of action, designed by its framer to perfect the human character. Political institutions are valuable only as they improve and morally elevate human nature. Wealth and power are subordinate considerations, and are far from constituting the real greatness of a state. I blush for mankind when I see interest the only tie that binds them to their country, when I see the social compact improved for no purpose but the accumulation of riches, and the prosperity of a nation decided by the successful avarice of its members. I wish to see patriotism exalted into a moral principle, not a branch of avarice. I wish to see governments established with the view of enlightening the mind and dignifying the heart....You will find that my political principles and ideas of government are branches of my moral system. You do not know what an enthusiast I have grown for liberty."¹

It was in Richmond that, for a young man, we find Channing taking a great interest and giving an unusual amount of thought to the problems of the day, slavery, international relationships, peace and war, and economic issues. He usually did his thinking with

¹Ibid., pp. 86-89.

pen in hand and wrote down his thoughts. He preferred, however, to correspond with some friend, inter-changing views. Another element of his stay in Richmond that delighted him was the opportunity to become a part of southern society which was rich in its fascination and charm. He availed himself of the chance to hear debates in the legislature. He found this not only a profitable study but a pleasure as we see from his remark, "The Virginians are the best orators I have ever heard."¹ His duties as tutor left him ample time for study and deeply did he ponder the movements of history and theology. The following fragments written during this period to his friend, Shaw, exemplify the eagerness with which he enlarged his store of learning and also a gift for the use of illustration. Our wish is that he had utilized this talent more fully in his later preaching. A great thought lingers more fully and lastingly in the mind if it has been impressed there by an unforgettable illustration. Truth through the medium of an illustration not only enters the mind more completely but the telling of it catches and centers the attention of its hearers. Here are a few fragments. "I admire above all Ferguson's Civil Society. You lost

¹Ibid., p. 96.

a treasure, Shaw when you sold it to me....What merit has Robertson's North America? Is he, like the Sun, more majestic in his setting?"¹ And then this as an example of his felicitous artistry in the use of illustrations.

"In ancient times, it was a common opinion, that Parnassus was hard to climb, and its top almost inaccessible. But in modern times, we seem to have made a beaten cart way over it, and where is the man who cannot travel it without difficulty or danger? Helicon was once represented as a scanty stream, and happy was he who could get a draught of it. But now it has become so bold a river, that every plough-boy in the field of science can water his horses at it. Inspiration descends in the form of a thick fog, and the beclouded fancy which paints a monster, while it aims at sketching nature, is admired for the boldness and wildness of its thoughts."²

Not only did he spend his sojourn in the South to much profit along educational and cultural pursuits but he found time to develop his mystic powers. We have already noted Channing's mystical communion with the beauty of nature as he lost himself in the unseen forces which speak so audibly along the Newport Beach. Then, too, we have shared with Channing something of the quiet, pastoral spirit of Cambridge and the opportunity for soul-searching to be found on the willow walks along the Charles. Once one has surveyed the prospect of beauty it lingers in the memory. In

¹Ibid., p. 100.

²Ibid., p. 101.

the South, along the banks of the James river, he often yielded himself to reverie. Usually, these experiences were delightful as he let himself be lost in the infinite. But at other times, a more somber mood took possession of his spirit and projected him to depths of loneliness and melancholy. At a later date he writes of the warfare his spirit experienced during these periods of melancholy musing.

"The young mind, when roused to life and power, is at first very much a chaos. Some at this critical period abandon themselves to sensual excesses, in hope of seizing that intense good which they thirst for. Some give themselves up to secret musings, and seek in unreal worlds what the actual world cannot give. Happy the young man who at this moment seizes on some views, however faint, of the true and great end of his being; who is conscious amidst his wild thoughts, that he has within himself a power of forming himself to something pure, noble, divine; who sympathizes with the generous, disinterested, heroic; who feels that he must establish an empire over himself or be lost. The idea of perfection is of necessity revealed to us at first very imperfectly; but if we seize it with faith in the possibility of realizing it, of rising to something higher than we are, and if faith give birth to resolution, then our youth with all its tumults and vehemence, is full of promise."¹

His young mind was impregnated with ideas on various subjects that later sprang forth to bless humanity. Thoughts of the benevolent nature of man, the falsity of selfishness and avarice; thoughts of a perfect society and a God perfect in his love and goodness became rooted in his mind and determined the

¹Ibid., p. 105.

path of his life. It was during these eighteen months in Virginia that there occurred his experience of conversion. Evidently it was the result of a growing conviction both of heart and mind that determined him to seek his life's career in divinity. Again in a letter to his friend, Shaw, he says,

"I am studing divinity harder than ever. Thanks to God who made me, I have chosen the only profession which could make me happy. By studying the Scriptures themselves, I am trying to discover the will of God, and the uncorrupted doctrines which our saviour taught. I am certain that I am impartial; and the honest mind is in little danger of going wrong.

I once called myself a Christian. But till lately I knew not the meaning of the word....The distinguishing duties of our holy religion are humility, purity, of heart, forgiveness of our worst enemies, forbearance under the heaviest injuries, detachment from the pleasures and pursuits of this world, and supreme affection to Deity. As charity is among the first of Christian virtues, Christianity necessarily requires of us an active life. It requires us to mingle with our fellow-men, and exert ourselves in promoting human happiness. By 'detachment from the world,' then, I do not mean monastic retirement. You cannot do too much in the world."¹

Channing at this period began an intensive and original study of the Scriptures and a searching analysis of the evidences of Christianity. This study led him after an unfaltering pursuit to a firm faith in the unique mission and character of Jesus Christ. All his life we find him basing his faith

¹Ibid., pp. 119-120.

and practice upon the two tenets, the trustworthiness of the Scriptures and the instrumentality of the human mind as interpreter of the mind of God.

There being no sympathetic person available in Virginia with whom he could share his sentiments and convictions, and small wonder, for infidelity was the open avowal of the major portion of the intelligentia of Virginia, Channing procured through his brother Francis, an introduction to the Rev. Joseph McKean, who ministered at Milton, Massachusetts. The following is a portion of a letter written by Channing during the correspondence.

"I wish to know what Christ taught, not what men have made him teach. I well knew, that, if I began with reading polemical divinity, there were ten chances to one that I should embrace the system of the first author which I studied whether right or wrong. I was certain, that, as Christ came to save the world, every truth essential to salvation must be plainly unfolded in the scriptures. I had also observed that many ministers instead of guiding their flocks to the gates of Heaven, had become so entangled in controversy as to neglect their most solemn charge, the saving of men's souls. These are the reasons which have induced me to apply to the Bible,-that only source of divine knowledge,-and to the Bible alone. The advantages I have derived from such a course seem to prove the propriety of it. I might have found the same truths in other authors, but they could never have made so forcible an impression on my mind. I have been active in acquiring, not passive in receiving, the great precepts and doctrines of Christianity, and the strength of my convictions is proportioned to the labor I have bestowed. My heart, too, has been affected as well as my mind enlightened. I have learned to

view everything as it were, through the medium of Scripture, to judge of actions by the standard of Scripture morality, and to estimate the importance of present wants by their influence on the happiness of another state. Such is the plan which I follow.I would thank you for your opinion on the propriety of it."¹

As he was after this practical but strenuous fashion forming his apologetic, no doubt the general catholicity of spirit that pervaded Richmond nurtured the liberality of his attitude. It was a critical time for his young soul; lonely, away from his friends, beset on every side by besieging forces of unbelief, we cannot help but wonder at the consecration that came to him at last. These words to his uncle hint as to his trials and difficulties.

"The Bible is wholly neglected....The glad tidings of a saviour are heard without joy. Infidelity is very general among the higher classes....In fine, religion is in a deplorable state. Many of the people have wondered how I could embrace such an unprofitable profession as the ministry....I believe I never experienced that change of heart which is necessary to constitute a Christian, till within a few months past. The worldling would laugh at me; he would call conversion a farce. But the man who has felt the influences of the Holy Spirit can oppose fact and experience to empty declaration and contemptuous sneers. You remember the language of the blind man whom Jesus healed,--'This I know that whereas I was blind, now I see.' Such is the language which the real Christian may truly utter. Once, and not long ago, I was blind, blind to my own condition, blind to the goodness of God and blind to the love of my Redeemer. Now I behold with shame and confusion the depravity and rottenness of my heart. Now I behold

¹Ibid., p. 123.

with love and admiration the long-suffering and infinite benevolence of Deity. All my sentiments and affections have lately changed. I once considered mere moral attainments as the only object I had to pursue. I have now solemnly given myself up to God. I consider supreme love to him as the first of all duties, and morality seems but a branch from the vigorous root of religion. I love mankind because they are the children of God. I practice temperance and strive for purity of heart, that I may become a temple for his holy spirit to dwell in. Religion is the only treasure worth pursuing. I consider the man who recommends it to society as more useful than the greatest statesman and patriot who adorns the page of history. What liberty so valuable as liberty of heart,--freedom from sin?"¹

Channing lived in an age pervaded by a gloomy theology, ^{and} however at this time he never made any assertions as to being either a Trinitarian or a Calvinist. Channing's eighteen months in the South were spent to much advantage in the enlargement of his knowledge and powers. It was most regrettable that because of youthful misunderstanding as to the application of his religious zeal, he sacrificed his health to such extent that he was handicapped the rest of his days. Though, never at any time did he become an advocate of the monastic practice of religious faith, there are times when he longed to be free of the whole of life and he emphasized a great deal that this life was a preparation for the next. In Virginia he adopted a very severe policy in regard to the

Ibid., pp. 126-127.

subjugation of the flesh. Like the monks of medieval days, he spent long hours in study, denied himself the proper food and slept in discomfort that at his first waking he should be able to spring up to resume his study. What with his loneliness and inward struggles of the spirit, combined with his long hours of study and too severe fasting, his body was worn down to a skeleton, his nervous system upset and his digestive organism almost destroyed. It was during this period of his life, without doubt, that the seeds of his physical debility were sown and the roots of the disease, which in later years overcame him, took hold.

Channing's early misapplication of religious zeal reminds us strongly of its misdirection in the life of Bernard of Clairvaux in the twelfth century. It was a devotion of spirit that carried Channing to the recognized leadership of a great religious movement much as it led St. Bernard to a merited prestige and power as the recognized head of medieval monasticism. For saintliness of living and preaching, Bernard was greatest of his day. He was the flower and culmination of medieval monasticism. All sorts of religious movements were afoot. Many of their founders were notable men. But the outstanding figure of the twelfth century was not a founder, but a man who attached

himself to an existing order, bringing it power and greatness. We cannot think of the Cistercians apart from Bernard of Clairvaux, for he was the embodiment of the monastic spirit and enthusiasm at its highest and best. There is an interesting similarity between Bernard of Clairvaux and Channing in a number of respects except that Channing was a liberal and Bernard most orthodox. However what Bernard was to the Cistercians, Channing was to the Unitarians. Both were mystics and ruined their physical health early in life through their disciplinary excesses. Channing was a combination of the severe asceticism of St. Bernard and the progressive liberalism of Abelard. Also, like Bernard, the thought of reforming society by bringing it back to simple methods of living became his dominant idea. Both were great students of the Bible. Both were appealed to by the moral, rather than the intellectual element in religion. Love of God was regarded as first of all duties and men were to be loved as children of God.

Channing returned to his home in Newport in the month of July, 1800. His health was almost completely broken. His self-denial, loneliness, depression and too rigid diet had changed him from a vigorous young man into a weak invalid, always having to nurse most

carefully his little remaining strength. Truly the spirit was strong but the flesh was weak.

The days of a young man's preparatory studies pass very quickly, and there is a tendency in the historian or biographer to pass over this period rather hastily in order to reach the fuller years beyond. However for one who has decided upon the ministry, the years of preparation are most important. Youth has ideals about life, and especially the life of Christian service, that tend of necessity to be toned down later on by the friction of every day routine. No doubt this statement would meet with indignant rebuttals by many souls well seasoned in the Lord's service, but I still dare affirm that generally speaking, the thoughts and ideals of a young man's Seminary life are higher and more enthusiastic than at any other extended period of his life. It is during this preparatory period that one glimpses high visions, walks in a daily atmosphere of consecration, reflected from both one's instructors and companions. The student lives in a delightful isolation from hard realities. His spirit is free. He has no overwhelming routine, monopolizing his energies. The whole world invites a young man into the ministry, once in, he is accepted as a part of

the Church to be used or misused, accepted or rejected. The professional ministry must bear upon its heart the cross of criticism, the deadening attitude of inertia and the open and wide-spread indifference which is the lot of the Church in a selfish world.

Channing was twenty years of age when he returned to Newport from the South. He was twenty-three when he was installed as Pastor of his first Church. There is a most interesting interval between commencing his theological studies and beginning to preach. Channing during these years did a great deal of thinking, pen in hand. In fact he appears to have been a most unusual student in his individual initiative and wisdom in mapping out his theological studies. At first he remained at home, where his undermined physical powers were partially restored by the tender and solicitous influences of his home. We find at this time a growing tendency toward retirement, a love of solitude. This habit tended to make him regard the pastoral obligations of his ministry rather less a pleasure than they are to one more socially inclined. Channing through his active self-analysis and vision, combined with his humanitarian interests and spiritual ideals, climbed the educational ladder in steady and practical fashion. He took care to

improve himself spiritually. He won a victory over a tendency he had to irritableness and sternness. He gained in self-confidence, mastering his sense of depression and weakness. He resolved on the simple things of life as being best for his physical and spiritual development. He decided to make doing good the business of his life. The following are lines at random selected from his early thoughts,

"In doing good, let me aim at simplicity of means....Let a silent, persevering course of action lead me to my end....Let me remember with Titus that I have lost that day in which I have done no good to a fellow man....Religion is amiable, gentle, cheerful, serene, a friend of the social affections, the source of disinterestedness. Let me not represent it, then, as gloomy or hopeless....Mildness is not inconsistent with manly firmness."¹

How much he was called upon to practice this good intention in an age of theological conflict and bitterness!

"Let charity embrace in her broad arms all sects. Why should I brand any who differ from me with opprobrious epithets? Let me unite with all who love Jesus Christ in sincerity in propagating his religion."²

For over a year Channing pursued his studies largely on his own initiative working at the library at Newport and meditating along the beach. Years later when Channing preached a sermon upon the occasion

¹Ibid., p. 134.

²Ibid., p. 134.

of the dedication of the Congregational Church at Newport, he described these days of preparation,

"In this town I pursued for a time my studies of theology. I had no professor or teacher to guide me; but I had two noble places of study. One was yonder beautiful edifice, now so frequented and so useful as a public library, then so deserted that I spent day after day and sometimes week after week amidst its dusty volumes, without interruption from a single visitor. The other place was yonder beach the roar of which has so often mingled with the worship of this place, my daily resort, dear to me in the sunshine, still more attractive in the storm. Seldom do I visit it now without thinking of the work, which there, in the sight of that beauty, in the sound of those waves, was carried on in my soul. No spot on earth has helped to form me so much as that beach. There I lifted up my voice in praise amidst the tempest. There, softened by beauty, I poured out my thanksgiving and contrite confessions. There, in reverential sympathy with the mighty power around me I became conscious of power within. There struggling thoughts and emotions broke forth, as if moved to utterance by nature's eloquence of the winds and waves. There began a happiness surpassing all worldly pleasures, all gifts of fortune, the happiness of communing with the works of God."¹

While at Newport, around the year 1800, Channing came under the influence of the ministry of Dr. Hopkins. Samuel Hopkins was born at Waterbury, Connecticut, in 1721. He was graduated from Yale College in 1741. He lived for a period of months at the home of Jonathan Edwards. He was settled as Pastor over a Church of 5 members at Housatonic. Edwards finally became Pastor at Stockbridge not far from Housatonic. So

¹"Christian Worship." Works, Volume IV, 1843 Edit., p. 337.

circumstances combined to make Hopkins, who was eighteen years younger than Edwards, the best representative of Edwardeanism in New England. In later years Hopkins became pastor of The First Congregational Church at Newport. He always had a cheerless ministry, being most retired, a gloomy theologian and of an unsociable temperament. He was a man of marvellous studious powers, systematic in method and developed a system of Theology which was one of the best statements of the New England System. Rev. William Hart applied the term Hopkinsian to this system as a term of ridicule but it became one of honor. Channing found the theory of disinterested benevolence embraced by Hopkins to be particularly appealing. He had read with great delight during his college course the philosophy of Hutcheson, and the morality of the stoics, and these had prepared him for the noble, self-sacrificing doctrines of Dr. Hopkins. Channing describes the theology of Dr. Hopkins in the following manner,

"Let me add one more example of the spirit of religious freedom on this island. You may be surprised, perhaps, when you hear me name in this connection the venerable man, who once ministered in this place, the Rev. Dr. Hopkins. His name is indeed associated with a stern and appalling theology, and it is true, that he wanted toleration towards those who rejected his views. Still in forming his religious opinions, he was superior to human authority; he broke away from human creeds; he interpreted God's word for himself he revered reason, the oracle of God within him.

His system, however fearful, was yet built on a generous foundation. He maintained that all holiness, all moral excellence, consists in benevolence, or disinterested devotion to the greatest good....I need not be ashamed to confess the deep impression which this system made on my youthful mind."¹

Dr. Hopkins was a student rather than a preacher. His mind was habitually employed in investigation; he lacked the art of communication. His manner lacked animation. He had exercised the severer faculties of the mind too much to give the imagination a fair chance. Channing found his appearance repelling and his pulpit delivery the worst he ever heard. Hardly an inviting figure was this otherworldly man, as, with a study cap on his head and a plaid gown fastened with a girdle about his waist he occasionally ventured forth on horseback! Then too his preaching was as somber as his appearance. Believing as he did in total depravity, and that there was nothing good in human nature to which he could appeal, believing that he could only benefit men by setting before them their utterly helpless condition, he dealt out his sulphurous principles without flinching.

However in the field of thought, Channing found him strong and helpful. As a 'Rational Calvinist,'

¹Ibid., pp.342-343.

Channing felt that Hopkins mitigated some of the harsher features of Calvinism and was a true example of the spirit of progress and free inquiry. Hopkinsianism was indeed an effort to reconcile Calvinism with reason and as such was not only an important factor in Channing's development but also a guiding and motivating impulse in the liberal revolt. In accordance with his free spirit of inquiry, a tame acquiescence in the established theology could not be expected. We find him making not a few important modifications of Calvinism. For example, the doctrine that we are liable for the sin of our first parent he wholly rejected, and not satisfied with denying the imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity, he modified what the old theology had set forth as the only foundation of divine acceptance, namely the imputation of Christ's righteousness or merits to the believer. The doctrine that Christ died for the elect only, found no merit at his hands. He taught that Christ suffered equally for all mankind. Channing was indebted in his early years to Hopkins for turning his thoughts and heart among other things to the glory of God, the nature of sin against Him and to the claims and majesty, of impartial, universal benevolence. In his thinking he imagined himself a disciple of reason

as well as revelation and believed his system, which included even the doctrine of predestination, to be sustained by profound metaphysical argumentation, and to rest on the only sound philosophy of the human mind, so that in receiving it, he did not abandon the ground of reason.

Channing, summing up the character of Dr. Hopkins said,

"The prominent light in which Dr. Hopkins is to be placed is that of a student seeking the glory of God and the spread of true religion, by purifying the common faith of its errors, and unfolding the Christian system in its harmony and true proportions. He had many qualities fitting him for a reformer,--great singleness of purpose, invincible patience of research, sagacity to detect and courage to expose errors, a thirst for consistency of views, and resolution to carry out his principles to their legitimate consequences. I consider him to have contributed largely to the more rational form in which Calvinism is held among us.... I indeed shrink with a feeling approaching horror from some of his doctrines; but do not on that account withhold the reverence due to his character."¹

This period of a year and a half at Newport sufficiently restored Channing to physical strength so that he was able to seriously take up his theological studies. In December 1801, he was elected to the office of Regent at Harvard University which gave a small remuneration for not too restricting duties, thus allowing ample time for private study. As the

¹William Henry Channing, op.cit., p. 142.

opportunities for theological study were comparatively meagre in those times, this particular position was established in no small part to allow some worthy candidate for the ministry to gain the necessary support while completing his studies. No more conscientious or promising student could have been found than William Channing. From his own private papers we read much of his methods of self-direction and study. What a contrast to the way information and knowledge are poured out in these times! What opportunities there are for education in our seminaries for any young man who wishes to avail himself of these privileges!

Though we do not know much about Channing's theological courses of study, which he pursued largely on his own initiative, we know, that at the time, both President Willard and Professor Tappan were accessible for his assistance and counsel. Dr. Tappan was considered one of the best preachers of the day. He was extremely careful not to prepossess the minds of his pupils, and always advised them to judge for themselves.

During his student years, Channing commenced a method of study which he continued throughout his life. Whether he was reading the opinions of others or following out his own line of thought, he usually had pen in hand and wrote out his ideas as they came to him. Writing, he often remarked, was

his method of making clear to himself, his own thoughts. This method developed in Channing the habit of methodical thinking. Setting down both the affirmative and negative aspects of a proposition side by side, his succinct conclusions could command the respect of all clear thinking men. Later in life when Channing expressed his theological and religious views, when the minds of many men were controlled by passions and prejudices, he spoke with a calm and persuading effect. This exactness of mind and honest adherence to the principles of dispassionate thinking should be noted in any appraisal of Channing as a theologian and religious teacher. Sometimes one feels that Channing stood aloof too long before taking a public stand and that when he did so the time when his help was most needed was past. There is a basis for this criticism in the later Channing. However, his reluctance, or slowness, cannot be attacked honestly on the grounds of timidity. It was a reluctance to impart to others, when the minds of men were kindled by passion, any thought on a controversial matter which he was not confident to be a calm and coherent statement and one according with established facts. Thus it is, that charges that he held back overlong, appear to be a condemnation of a commendable trait in Channing rather than a fault.

During this formative period of his thinking while a theological student, we find Channing,

"....cautiously and patiently investigating the great problems,-as to the Divine Being and Character,-Human Nature, its destiny and duties,-Christ and Christianity,-Society and its various relations,-to the solution of which his after life was consecrated....It was a process in which piety, scientific thinking, imagination, humanity and love of beauty were blended, to lift him into communion with spiritual realities."¹

No student ever gave more impartial consideration to the views that were contemporary with him than did Channing. Let us pause to consider various thinkers and their positions which were influencing the thinking of that period. In college, Channing shared the reviving interest in Shakespeare which was then taking place. Shakespeare's beauty of style and genius in the depiction of human character were always his delight. Later, in an essay on the character of Milton he acknowledged this admiration. Hutcheson awakened in him the consciousness that the human soul is ceaseless in its yearning reach for moral perfection. One of the mountain top experiences of his college life took place as he was reading some of Hutcheson's thoughts on man's capacity for disinterested affection as exemplified in the surrender of private interests and the acceptance of private hardships for the welfare of all. The principle of loyalty to the highest, universal good as the purpose and highest glory of human effort captured his mind. Then, it seemed that he entered a new

¹Ibid., pp. 152-153.

spiritual realm.

"The glory of the Divine disinterestedness, the privilege of existing in a universe of progressive order and beauty, the possibilities of spiritual destiny, the sublimity of devotedness to the will of the Infinite Love, penetrated his soul; and he was so borne away in rapturous visions, that, to quote his own words,....'I longed to die, and felt as if heaven alone could give room for the exercise of such emotions; but when I found I must live, I cast about to do something worthy of these great thoughts,....'"¹

Channing's faith in the power of disinterested virtue always grew stronger.

Early in his college years he became interested in moral and social reform. Ferguson's thoughts on civil society awakened his powers in the interest of social needs. He read Price in college and he once remarked that Price had saved him from the empiricism of Locke's philosophy. Kant's views of the moral law and human reason inspired in him a reverence for man's nature and powers. Schelling's philosophy of the permeation of the divine in all creation confirmed Channing's views of the universal nature of God. Fichte's stoicism struck a responsive chord in Channing's somber meditations upon the sublimity of man. Channing found delight in reading the Stoics. The strict discipline and purity of their tenets met his approval. His own philosophical speculations tended toward the transcendental, or intuitive, direction. At this time, Paine's,

¹Ibid., p. 63-64.

"Age of Reason", was much read in this country causing real concern. Watson's Apology for the Bible was presented to each college student as an answer to the doctrines set forth by Paine. At this period we see that while agnostic and atheistic views were fully weighed, Channing's own powers of independent thinking could not be swayed by these outside influences.

Channing's was the type of mind to prove all things and to hold fast to that which was good. Many years later Judge Story writing of Channing's life during his college period said:-

"What he then was, was mainly owing to the impulses of his own mind and heart,....I cannot help thinking that external influences were not those which mainly contributed to fix the character of his life. The influences which seem to me to have regulated his pursuits,....were chiefly from within;-the workings of genius upon large materials, a deep and wakeful sensibility, an ardent love of truth and moral purity, a conscience quickened and chastened by an earnest sense of religious obligation, and a spirit elevated by a warm interest in the human race."¹

During Channing's period of theological study, New England was steeped in Calvinistic doctrines. It was a gloomy, forbidding theology. To rationalize the theology of Calvin, with its doctrines of predestination and original sin, with the thought of a loving God, involved theological thinkers of that period in constant controversy. Channing who was reared in a

¹Ibid., p. 62.

home more inclined to the orthodox than the liberal, naturally was brought face to face with this mighty theology of Calvin especially through the instrumentality of Jonathan Edwards, a man of exceptional power and ability, who was the very bulwark of Calvinistic theology in America.

Edwards was born at East Windsor, Connecticut, in 1703, and was graduated from Yale College in 1720. He became a theological mind of the first rank, the most acute thinker America had yet produced. He wrote voluminously, setting forth the main doctrines of Calvinism. His vigorous opposition to the Halfway Covenant, which allowed people admission to Church membership and the Lord's Supper before regeneration had taken place, resulted in his dismissal from the Church at Northampton which he had served for many years. He was a great friend of Hopkins who studied under him and interpreted his teachings in what became known as Hopkinsianism. Hopkins who almost worshipped Edwards became the best representative of Edwardianism in this period. Channing came under the influence of Hopkins while a boy at Newport. The principles of the whole system of Calvinism repulsed his very nature and though he could admire the virtues and powers of its advocates he was repelled by their doctrines. Channing expresses this detestation for the Calvinistic system

in a treatise written in Boston in 1809, which he entitled, "The Moral argument against Calvinism." We shall take up these views more fully when considering Channing's theological teachings.

Channing pursued his theological studies at Cambridge, making use of such books as the Harvard library afforded. He made steady progress in spite of periods of extreme mental depression when the weight of the world seemed to oppress his faculties and to deaden his interest in everything.

He was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Cambridge Association. He was suspected of leaning towards Orthodoxy because of his background. However he was careful to avoid controversial questions in his trial sermon and was passed without difficulty. His own testimony has been preserved.

"There was a time when I verged towards Calvinism,for ill health and depression gave me a dark view of things. But the doctrine of the Trinity held me back....I followed Doddridge through his 'Rise and Progress' till he brought me to a prayer to Jesus Christ. There I stopped, and wrote to a friend that my spiritual guide was gone where I could not follow him. I was never in any sense a Trinitarian."¹

Though his regard for Dr. Hopkins was high, Channing was too much a disciple of free inquiry to accept his views. Channing's own theology at this

¹Ibid., p. 161.

time might be described as based upon Hopkinsianism but with strong Arian tendencies.

Channing began to preach in October, 1802. He was then in his twenty-third year. He must have begun his preaching career in a most felicitous manner for in a short time we find calls extended to him from two Boston Churches to become their Pastor. One of these was the strong Brattle St. Church. The other was the Federal St. Society which was much the smaller of the two. With characteristic foresight and humility, Channing felt himself unable to fulfill the demands that a congregation the size of the Brattle St. Society would impose upon him and after considerable thought accepted the call from the Federal St. Society. He was ordained on Wednesday, June 1st., 1803.

Certainly it may be said that no young man could have entered his chosen profession with greater seriousness or sincerity. Without exaggeration, it may be said that he was too serious for the good of his happiness and health. Continually striving to overcome what he felt to be his shortcomings, he sought the means of severe self-examination, contemplation and continual study, withdrawing almost entirely from society. Naturally, this method of triumphing over his shortcomings resulted in an overstrained sense

of his responsibility. Periods of intense mental agony and sadness came upon him which aggravated his ill health and almost caused complete discouragement. The first years of his ministry were passed in constant self-scrutiny that he might attain a complete victory of pure and holy thinking. So earnest was he in seeking perfect goodness of character, that he sought complete victory over even the most inconsequential temptation. He drew up a chart of self-discipline which he steadfastly observed. After a period he went to live in the parsonage, tactfully inviting his family to come as a favor to him. He chose the coldest and smallest room in the house, for himself, living in the strictest self-denial. There is no question that the jollity and companionship of his family were good for him. Often, also, seasons of great physical weakness came upon him requiring the tenderest care. No one regretted this handicap of periodic ill health more than he, as he saw enlarging opportunity for activity and service hampered by his debility.

Three qualities of Channing during the first years of his ministry are outstanding, though numerous others could be mentioned. One has already been suggested, namely, his sense of duty. We have noted how loyalty to what he believed his duty led him to a personal

strictness practically amounting to tyranny. As he matured, he recognized that duty is wedded to the principle of growth and this union gave birth in due time to his main view as to the chief end of human aspiration. In the second place, numerous accounts of his activity during these years reveal his unselfish generosity, not only with his means but in his attitude towards those with whom he came into contact. Receiving a substantial salary, for those times, he gave liberally to all needy cases which came to his attention. It is estimated that nearly two-thirds of his salary was expended in this way. He regretted the times he could not help, not having a cent in his pocket. He made it the principle of his whole life to give away all he earned, using only what was necessary to meet his frugal needs. We find, too, that he was prodigal of the time he bestowed upon callers who, enjoying his fellowship, remained long hours, so that frequently the last lines of his sermon were not put down till the church bell was ringing for the morning service. Another aspect of generosity which he exemplified throughout his life was his refusal to become a party to gossip or scandal. Many such offending characters were silenced with his quiet words, "Pray, stop! For if you continue these remarks, I shall feel bound to

repeat every word to the person of whom you are speaking."¹ However, the outstanding point of his early work was his great power and promise as a preacher. His purity of spirit, lofty sincerity and eloquence drew people to his little Church in increasing throngs. The earnest simplicity, deep spirituality and enthusiastic power of his sermons appealed to all classes of hearers. Though his sermons were finished products of grace and style they were practical in the direct application of spiritual teaching to the problems of actual life. Channing's natural seriousness and the earnest effort he put forth on his sermons gave them a mature quality and in a remarkably short time he had acquired considerable reputation in the vicinity of Boston. Not being denominationally minded, his frequent pulpit exchanges but served to increase that fame.

Aside from his brilliant work in the pulpit and his persevering pastoral endeavors, he gave much thought and study to the problems of the poor. He felt that elevation of their lot by moral encouragement was a great end of his ministry. He gave much thought to their problem and spent a great deal of time in what would today be called fieldwork. He promoted better housing, loftier amusements and more practical youth

¹Ibid., p. 200.



education. He interested himself in preaching a gospel of comfort to the inmates of the poor-house, made many visits to poor families and wherever possible sought employment for needy cases.

During the first twelve years of his ministry his congregations increased steadily. He kept abreast of the times and closely followed political happenings both at home and throughout the world. This was reflected in his preaching and though some criticized his outspoken truths as 'notoriety seeking', men loved him for his kindly virtues, his sincerity in selfless service, and were moved to conviction by his fearless, consecrated eloquence. In a sermon Channing preached at the ordination of Rev. John Codman in 1808, he mentions the above qualities as fitting attributes of a Christian Minister. He exhorted the ministry to be instant in season, out of season, to be earnest, fervent, disinterested, humble and zealous in all public and private endeavors, that the great principles of the Christian Gospel, may be vitally communicated to others.

For convenience Channing's ministry may be thought of in three nearly equal sections. The first section includes the period from his installation as Pastor of the Church on Federal Street to the year 1815. We think of these years as the quieter, developing period

of his ministry. These years were filled with study and cheerful, profitable labors. Deep sorrow touched him early, in the death of his oldest brother, Francis, who died in the Autumn of the year 1810, while on an ocean voyage in a vain attempt to regain his health. His beloved sister, Ann, who had married Washington Allston, also died an early death in London, February 2, 1815. Channing was united in marriage to his cousin, Ruth Gibbs, in the Summer of 1814. In this felicitous marriage, Channing enjoyed many years of serenity and happiness.

We may now consider a second section of Channing's ministry which may be generally outlined during the years 1815 to 1830. Channing grew as his years advanced. More and more he became the teacher of the liberal attitude. Though never surrendering the Hopkinsian principle of disinterested benevolence, he departed more and more from the formal doctrines of the orthodox theology. Shunning all controversy and most cautious in the expression of his own beliefs without the completest examination, nevertheless as sides became more definitely defined, Channing found himself on the liberal side. Finally, refusing to remain any longer on the defensive, and opportunity presenting itself, he gave utterance to that masterly apologetic of liberalism in 1819, known as the Baltimore sermon.

This established him as the recognized leader of the New England liberals who became the Unitarian denomination. Though he gave the denomination the prestige of his leadership, he felt himself but little of a Unitarian, preferring, always, to teach the universal and ageless truths of the Christian Gospel.

During this period four children were born to the Channing home, two sons and two daughters. His first-born, a daughter, however, lived but twenty-four hours after birth. His sadness at her death in 1816, was lightened by the birth of another daughter in 1818.

In 1820, Channing received the degree of Doctor of Divinity, the degree being conferred upon him by Harvard University.

Channing's work as a Boston pastor being most commendable, it is not surprising that other fields sought his pastoral services. So it was that in 1820, the First Congregational Society of the City of New York invited him to accept a field of service with them. Without hesitation he wrote thanking them for their 'Call' but declining, believing that both public and private considerations gave him no liberty to forsake his Boston post. He remained at Boston in the strong conviction that he was but following the will of God.

Dr. Channing's health always continuing to weaken and handicap him, he was in the habit of spending several months each summer at Oakland, a summer place in Rhode Island, owned by Mrs. Gibbs, mother of Mrs. Channing. These quiet months of complete rest amid the beauty and charm of his beloved Island were essential for continuing his work. However, his health gradually became so alarming that he was given a year's leave of absence by the Federal St. Society that he might try the effect of an ocean voyage and the change of living a year abroad.

Dr. and Mrs. Channing sailed near the end of May, 1822 and visited the British Isles, France, Switzerland and Italy. His weakness prevented his travelling as much as the average tourist, but being unusually observant, Channing profited much and was stimulated by the welcome of many liberally minded people who knew him through his reputation. While in Rome, he received the sad news of his youngest son's death. In this sorrow he writes, "Death is not the wide gulf between us and the departed which we are apt to imagine...."¹

The accounts of his return to his pulpit, the

¹William Henry Channing, "Memoir of William Ellery Channing", Volume 11, p. 234.

re-dedication of his whole being, all his faculties and affections to God, his lofty conception of the responsibility, privilege and importance of the Christian ministry, make the most inspirational reading.

In the Spring of 1824, the Rev. Ezra Stiles Gannett, became an associate pastor of the Federal Street Society. During the passing of eighteen years from that time till the death of Dr. Channing, the mutual relations between these two pastors and the Church continued in the highest esteem and respect. As time passed and Dr. Channing gave more of whatever attention his feebleness permitted him to the wider application of his principles in philanthropic and social reforms he gradually and voluntarily reduced his remuneration from the Federal St. Church, until the proprietors of the Society, in 1840 acquiesced to his most earnest request to have his financial arrangement with the Society terminated. His request was granted with regret and resolutions of esteem. Though all functional obligations were thus terminated, his formal relationship as senior pastor of the Society continued until his death.

Before we leave our story of the first two sections of Channing's ministry mention should be made of his influence as a preacher. Great as were

Channing's efforts towards a more liberal attitude in theology and a more practical application of Christian principles to the social problems of humanity, his utter seriousness, his complete consecration of mind and spirit, his ability to communicate his sentiments and to capture the convictions of his hearers, by the steady drive of his logic and gripping eloquence, merit a greater consideration of his place in history as a preacher than has yet been made. To appraise his remarkable gifts and felicitous artistry, the moving harmony of his sermonic constructions and pulpit delivery, the mystic presences of other powers becoming realities through the medium of his imageries and illustrations, is an inviting field were it not beyond the limit of a consideration of his theological and religious teaching. Channing's preaching persuaded the minds and hearts of many people to reverence God, to love Him, and live as in His presence.

It was during this second period of his Ministry that Channing preached his famous Baltimore Sermon in 1819 entitled 'Unitarian Christianity'. This was followed by another masterly sermon, entitled, 'Unitarian Christianity Most Favorable to Piety' which was delivered at the dedication of the Second Unitarian Church of New York City in 1826. His succinct and scholarly

Dudleian Lectures on 'The Evidences of Revealed Religion' delivered in 1821, also served to enhance his place among the foremost of the world's religious thinkers. Channing's method was not that of the controversialist. When he spoke, he did so in no uncertain terms both in defense of what he believed and in opposition to what he felt to be error. Doctrines were held up for comparison, subjected to the impartial light of reason, and accepted or condemned. Once Channing had written a sermon or stated his theological opinion, it was finished business. It had to stand or fall on its own merit. He made no reply to those who criticised or condemned his views, nor did he allow a theological difference to become a personal one.

It was during this second period, also, that Channing gave three essays to the world which were widely circulated and read both in America and across the Atlantic. His great tribute to Milton was first published in the winter of 1826-27 in the 'Christian Examiner'. He finds Milton's character to have been distinguished by its 'Sublimity', and to have risen, ".....not by effort or discipline, but by a native tendency and a godlike instinct, to the contemplation of objects of grandeur and awfulness."¹

"Remarks on the Character and Writings of John Milton", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 499.

Milton's poetry was characterized by its seriousness in contrast to Shakespeare whose imagination revelled equally in the somber and mirthful. He felt that Milton's prose writings were disfigured by undue, "....coarse invective and controversial asperity...."¹ Aside from this objection he considered Milton's prose marked by the same 'vigorous mind' as was his poetry. Channing justly paid tribute to Milton's 'magnanimity' of character. He termed Milton an anti-Trinitarian, ranking him with Locke and Newton, but did not attempt to identify him with any sect. He felt that Milton's service was that,

"He taught and exemplified that spirit of intellectual freedom, through which all the great conquests of truth are to be achieved, and by which the human mind is to attain to a new consciousness of its sublime faculties, and to invigorate and expand itself forever."²

The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte by Sir Walter Scott occasioned another essay from Channing's pen, entitled 'Remarks On the Life and Character of Napoleon Bonaparte', and published in 1828. This essay is one of his most lengthy works. It is somewhat more than a character sketch. It is a comparison of principles and criticizes the life of Napoleon as being motivated by inferior principles. Thus the character of Napoleon was the result of disastrous influences. Channing sought to expose

¹Ibid., p. 503.

²Ibid., p. 521.

these inferior principles and to state the worthier foundations of character. Channing never admired Napoleon. He felt that Napoleon having exerted unprecedented power during his life, was now influencing the world by his character and this was a bad omen. Channing observed that 'military talent' is one of the "....lower forms of genius...."¹ In Napoleon's life this 'talent' was expressed in egotistical self-exaggeration, the usurping of human rights, and tyrannical misuse of power. Channing divided power into three different orders; the moral, the intellectual and lastly, greatness of action. With an intuitive ability to grasp a situation at a glance, and to construct and put into operation the necessary machinery to accomplish his object, Napoleon's greatness lay in the fact that he possessed extraordinary capacities for action. But Channing pointed out that this type of greatness was inferior to the intellectual and the moral.

"To institute a comparison in point of talent and genius between such men (Napoleon, Wellington, Nelson) and Milton, Bacon and Shakespeare is almost an insult on these illustrious names."²

Part two of the essay is a study of 'The Principle of Action' as a fit sequel to the consideration of

¹ "Remarks on the Life and Character of Napoleon Bonaparte", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 524.

²Ibid., p. 525.

Napoleon. "Power was the idol to which Bonaparte sacrificed himself."¹ It was not the inward power of spiritual conviction and strength nor outward power over things which achieves and blesses, but an ambition for power over one's fellow-creatures, which Napoleon manifested. This ambition, Channing points out, instigates more crime and spreads more misery than any other cause. "It is the part of Christians to look on the passion for power and dominion with strong abhorrence; for it is singularly hostile to the genius of their religion."² Thus it was that Channing felt that Napoleon's life was a lesson to mankind that freedom, which is another name for justice, honor and benevolence cannot come by the instrumentality of the sword or despot; that in the wisdom and goodness of God's providence, liberty can come only as a peaceful revolution through the instrumentality of enlightened consciences and the gentle, yet sovereign, power of truth and virtue.

Channing's essay entitled, 'Remarks on the Character and Writings of Fenelon', written in 1829, is Channing at his best. He was in close sympathy, with the views and spirit of Fenelon. One detects

¹Ibid., p. 547.

²Ibid., p. 554.

a likeness to Channing in the character of Fenelon and one feels that in this essay Channing unconsciously was painting his own portrait. He felt that Fenelon's views of human nature were too dark and accounted for this by the atmosphere in which he lived. Channing speaks of Fenelon as having "....fully received the Christian doctrine of God."¹ However he felt it necessary to go beyond Fenelon's theory of human perfection. This theory was expressed in the words, "....self-crucifixion and love to God...."² Though Channing is in hearty accord with these principles, he points out the danger of a wrong emphasis in striving for their attainment. True piety is not the narrowing or excessive denial of human nature, but rather its ceaseless aspiration, despite all obstacles, towards the noblest and best. We shall have occasion to mention these essays again when considering Channing's views more specifically.

The growth of the Liberal movement in New England of which Channing was the acknowledged leader resulted in the formation of the American Unitarian Association, in 1825. The Presidency of this organization was offered Channing but ill health prevented his acceptance.

¹"Remarks on the Character and Writings of Fenelon", 1883 Edit., p. 566.

²Ibid., p. 567.

During the period from 1830 to his death, Channing, being largely free from the limitations of pastoral work, used his gifts as preacher and teacher in a wider way. By pulpit and pen, he sought to extend the benefits of the principles he so thoroughly believed to men of all conditions and classes. He set forth principles for the instruction of the criminal, the reform of the intemperate and the elevation of the poor. His great desire was to open to all men free opportunities for the highest spiritual development. He gave every support possible to Father Taylor and his work among seamen. Also, he gave largely of his time and means to 'The Ministry at Large' and the labors of Dr. Tuckerman among workingmen. Channing's firm belief in free thought and free speech led him in 1834 to head a petition in behalf of Abner Kneeland, an unbeliever, who had been sentenced to imprisonment for teaching his views. His stand in this matter exerted a wide influence upon the public mind. A similar sentiment led him to support the Rev. John Pierpont, when liquor interests sought to expel him from the Hollis Street Church. He rejoiced in the return of Rev. Pierpont to his congregation because he saw in it the triumph of freedom over the idolatry of wealth and its subverting tendencies over the pulpit,

the press and public opinion. In the fall of 1830, Channing sailed from Boston to spend a winter in the island of Santa Cruz. There he saw the evils of slavery once again at first hand. Returning to Boston he preached against it, but seemed to be biding his time. One day in the year 1834, a close friend rebuked him for his silence on the matter. Instead of a defensive reply, Channing was silent some time and then said humbly, "I acknowledge the justice of your reproof; I have been silent too long."¹ Shortly after, he published his book, 'Slavery' which vastly strengthened antislavery sentiment throughout the Union. He followed this with several other articles in behalf of the anti-slavery cause. This firm stand cost him many friends; some of whom passed him on the street without greeting. Under a strong conviction of duty, he continued till his death as the champion of the antislavery cause. It was the theme of his last public address. A few weeks before his death, he composed, as his strength permitted him, a discourse on 'Emancipation in the British West Indies'. Then inviting a few friends together at Lenox, Massachusetts, he preached what has since been known as his Lenox Address, on the

¹ William Henry Channing, "Memoir of William Ellery Channing", Volume III, p. 158.

1st. of August, 1842, it being the anniversary of emancipation in the British West Indies. Channing interpreted this great movement as the glorious triumph of Christianity, a triumph accomplished by the spirit of justice and benevolence which Christianity had motivated. And he believed this spirit had but begun its work. In the Lenox Address, Channing as seer, humanitarian, and apostle of human liberty voices an inspiring symphony of his faith in God, in truth and in human nature. In a letter to a friend (Mrs. E. L. Follen, September, 1842) he writes,

"My First of August address was written under the inspiration of the mountains, which you know are the 'Holy Land' of liberty.....I do not know that I ever spoke with more effect. I felt that I had found my way to the hearts of my hearers."¹

The evening of October 2nd., 1842, his spirit, "Always young for Liberty!"² entered the portal of fullest life. He died after an illness of twenty-six days at Bennington, Vermont. He had been stricken while on his way home to Boston from Lenox. The account of his last days is appropriately told in the 'Memoirs'.³ He fell asleep quietly, the curtains of a window having been drawn back that he might see the sunset. A few days before his last, he had said,

¹Ibid., p. 241.

²E. P. Peabody, "Reminiscences of William Ellery Channing", p. 344.

³William Henry Channing, Op. Cit., pp. 481-486.

"'We need to feel the reality,'--with emphasis and expressiveness,--'the REALITY of a spiritual life.'"¹
His last words were, "'I have received many messages from the spirit.'"²

The funeral service was held on the afternoon of Friday, October 7th., at the Federal St. Church. The service was in charge of Dr. Gannett who gave a simple appropriate eulogy. A tribute to Channing's free spirit was the fact that when his body was borne from the Church, the bells of the Roman Catholic cathedral tolled with the others.

His resting place is in the beautiful Mount Auburn cemetery. A rather simple monument marks the spot. It bears an inscription commemorating ".....his eloquence and courage in maintaining and advancing the Great Cause of Truth, Religion, and Human Freedom....."³

In 1859, the Federal St. Society erected a new meeting-house at the corner of Boylston and Arlington Streets. It was modelled after St. Martin's-in-the-Field in London. The new Church was dedicated in the year 1861. Inside, we may view a miniature reproduction of the old Federal St. meeting-house and the pulpit

¹Ibid., p. 482.

²Ibid., p. 485.

³Inscription on Channing's monument, Mount Auburn Cemetery.

from which Channing preached. At the right of the central door, a marble tablet has been erected in memory of Channing.

Opposite the main door of the Arlington Street Church, a bronze statue of Channing stands in the Public Garden. The statue was unveiled on June 1, 1903, one hundred years after the ordination of Channing as minister of the Federal Street Society. The Statue stands in a stone canopy on the back of which are inscribed some of Channing's characteristic principles.

"I see the marks of God in the Heavens and the earth but how much more in a liberal intellect, in magnanimity, in unconquerable rectitude, in a philosophy which forgives every wrong and which never despairs of the cause of Christ and Human virtue. I do and I must reverence Human nature. I bless it for its kind affections. I honor it for its achievements in science and in art and still more for its example of heroic and Saintly Virtue. These are marks of a divine origin and the pledges of a celestial inheritance and I thank God that my own lot is bound up with that of the human race."¹

¹Plaque in memory of Channing in the Public Garden, opposite the Arlington Street Church, Boston

CHAPTER 11

CHANNING AS A THEOLOGIAN

The purpose of this section is to consider Channing's theological views. That he held a place of importance in the first half of the 19th century in America is theological history. The importance of that place, the nature of his views, from the point of view of his period is the object of this analysis. Thus we shall place him in his period of theological history and appraise his thought according to the light of his time.

When William Ellery Channing was born in 1780 there were no Unitarian Churches in America. The first one was the Episcopalian King's Chapel, in Boston, which became Unitarian in 1785. Unitarianism, except for this event, had no distinct beginning in America. It was rather a natural consequence of liberal tendencies within the established churches.

One can hardly conceive of a more difficult experience than that which beset the Puritans during their first century in America. Every possible physical and spiritual force seemed to be against them. Their outward existence was one of continual turmoil. Their struggle to survive against the rigors of the New

England climate was enough to tax the heroism of the hardiest. Then, there were the Indians. The first century of the colonization of New England is a story written in bloodshed and death. The young country was not conquered for civilization without a struggle. Sickness, Indian raids, wars and contentions, kept life such a continual turmoil of bloodshed and tragedy that one shudders at the reading of it. The Puritans had crossed the sea to Christianize the new land. They soon found that though they could protect themselves from their enemies, could repress witchcraft and exclude Antinomianism and Quakerism, they could not eradicate from their own natures and their children the elements which tend to spiritual decay. Increase Mather in 1678 said, "The body of the rising generation is a poor, perishing, unconverted and (except the Lord pour down his spirit) undone generation."¹ The original plan was to maintain a strictly regenerate Church. The result was that the ranks of the Churches were being depleted and the communities paganized. As the evils were rapidly getting worse, conferences were held to decide what action should be taken in order to widen the influence of the Church. A group

¹H. M. Dexter, "The Congregationalism of the last Three hundred Years, as seen in its Literature" p. 476.

of thirteen teaching elders from Massachusetts met to consider the matter in 1657. These were joined by four delegates from Connecticut. They considered a plan called the Halfway Covenant. Later a larger Synod in 1662 gave it approval. The Halfway Covenant took the view that the Lord's Supper was a converting ordinance and so could be administered to unregenerates as well as the regenerate. But in spite of this drastic concession, something far more fundamental and powerful was needed to restore spiritual zeal. The Great Revival of 1740 seemed to be the answer to this and the Halfway Covenant fell into oblivion. Puritanism ran its course in New England during the century from 1630 to 1730. Its vain compromise to the Halfway Covenant was but the feeble gasp of its ebbing vitality. It gave way to what is generally spoken of as the New England School which dominated the scene for a century between 1730 and 1830. To understand Channing, one must comprehend something of the nature of this movement. Its purpose was to save the truths of the Gospel from the forces of infidelity and materialism. It sought to breathe a new spirit into the prevailing doctrinal tenets. The great question was how could man's dependence and responsibility be reconciled? If he were inherently sinful how could he be required

to will or prefer the good? The great names of the movement are Edwards, Hopkins, Emmons and Taylor. This question brought out numerous controversial discourses.

Both Puritanism and Separatism were markedly Calvinistic in their sentiments. But by 1730, it was evident that Calvinism was in difficulties. By the time of the Great Awakening of 1740, the combined forces of liberalism and that of religious conservatism came into direct collision. Jonathan Edwards was the foundation of the conservative group. A great scholar, natural theologian and metaphysician, he was the greatest figure of the New England Theology. He was settled in 1727 as colleague of Solomon Stoddard at Northampton. Nowhere was there greater agreement with the Halfway Covenant than in that particular church. Edwards was strongly Calvinistic and not in accord with the idea of the Halfway Covenant. He urged upon every awakened sinner the immediate duty of his repentance and faith, the exerting of every effort in seeking the salvation of the soul. A small revival took place in his church about the year 1735. Edwards participated in the Great Awakening of 1740 with great energy and interest. However his attitude toward the Halfway Covenant aroused such a ferment

in his church that it led to his dismissal in 1750.

Edwards' contribution to New England Theology was a new and definite statement of Calvinism. It was a modified Calvinism to be sure, but all the fundamentals were there. His great effort was to rid religious thinking of Arianism and Arminianism. The great issue between the Arminians and the Calvinists was the relation of human freedom to responsibility. Edwards was more interested in refuting Arminianism than supplying a definite doctrine of responsibility. Edwards also was bitterly opposed to Pelagianism, feeling that its denial of the doctrine of Original Sin undermined the whole doctrine of Grace.

Samuel Hopkins, eighteen years younger than Edwards, studied under him and became his devoted friend and follower. He was New England's best representative of Edwardeanism. Though a retiring personality and very weak preacher, he had considerable ability as a theologian. With slight modifications he carried on the theology of Edwards. His last pastorate was at Newport where Channing came under his influence as a boy and became greatly interested in his theory of the Divine Benevolence, though we have noted how Channing viewed with shuddering abhorrence the doctrines of New England Orthodoxy regarding man and sin.

Hopkins maintained the doctrine of Divine Government. It holds the perfect exercise of God's character, His anger against sin, His righteousness and goodness.

At the close of the 18th century we find three well defined groups in the New England School. There were the right wing, middle and left wing groups. The right wing called themselves Consistent or Thorough Calvinists. They took Calvinism, as interpreted by Edwards, seriously and thoroughly accepted it. The middle group were called Moderate Calvinists. Their beliefs were based on a somewhat vague and modified Calvinism, strongly tinged with Arminianism. This inconsistency did not trouble them because, like the majority of ministers who are not theologically inclined, the important thing is Christian living rather than orthodox thinking. Then there was the left wing. These men like the Consistent Calvinists were thoroughgoing but it meant a complete rejection of the Calvinistic position with all its implications. Thus, at the close of the 18th century, the situation can best be described as a deadlock. The Moderates were in the majority but as long as this was true the situation would remain unchanged. Something was needed to cause the Moderate group to move either towards the conservative or liberal wing. The first

decade of the 19th century was to witness a decided swing.

THE UNITARIANS

No one can definitely define the beliefs of Unitarianism. However, its emphasis was anti-Trinitarian. It stressed the idea of the unity of God. He is the one, supreme object of worship. Christ, though more than man, was not to be the object of worship. Unitarianism claimed that the Trinity was read into the Scriptures and could not be rationally supported. As a protest against the Trinity, Unitarianism may be considered to have existed in early Christian history. Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch, A. D. 260, and Sabellius, A. D. 217, were suppressed by the Roman Church for their opposition to the Trinity.

Arius, Presbyter of Alexandria, A. D. 318, sought to avoid the pitfall of Tritheism by rationalizing the supremacy and unity of God. It was a definite, easily understood rationalism, and still numbers many who seek refuge from the Trinity. It was an early Deism making the division between God and man an absolute one, with Christ and the Holy Spirit as equal, subordinate instrumentalities of God.

In reformation times, Michael Servetus (1511-53),

a catholic of independent mind, after a study of the Bible, wrote out a simple creed of God and Christ. His views challenged the doctrine of the Trinity on Scriptural grounds. He met his martyrdom at Geneva in consequence of that challenge. His death in the cause of independent thinking aroused doubts as to the morality of a system which exacted such a penalty for seeking the truth.

Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), was a free-thinking Italian. He was troubled by the moral and religious implications of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Christian religion according to Socinus, was the way to salvation and eternal life, and divinely revealed by the Scriptures. Socinus denied that Christ's death bought man's salvation; he could not accept the Trinity, or the doctrines of Original Sin or Predestination. However, his chief interest was not negative but in the sincere wish to understand God's will, to know the nature of man and to find the true way of salvation. Socinus believed that reason could be relied upon to interpret the Scriptures aright. He was thus emphasizing the basic idea of Unitarianism, namely, the right of the mind to free inquiry and the dependability of its judgment.

Though it is impossible in a brief introduction

to Channing's theological views to bring out anything but the main ideas of Unitarianism as they took root in history, there were two or three influences in the development of English thought which should be noted. The first of these was the Latitudinarian Movement, derived largely from a group of thinkers known as the Cambridge Platonists. Their desire for Christian unity and the practice of Christian teachings was far stronger than differences over doctrinal statement. Such men as Whichcote, Cudworth and More, were evangelical, but not controversial. They believed in righteousness and in love. They wished the fewest possible number of doctrines. They had faith in the power of reason under God's moral guidance to lead men aright. They are distinguished because of the broad-minded liberality of their thought.

A second influence was that of the Deists. In the 17th century, Descartes, a Frenchman, had evolved the principle of the sufficiency of reason as a criterion of truth, that was to exert considerable influence on subsequent theological speculation. However, though Descartes is in evidence in later Unitarianism, he is hardly to be related to the Deists who had no use for his doctrine of innate ideas. The Deists, however are to be reckoned with in any history of the beginnings of Unitarianism. The movement found

its beginning with Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1633). The precise meaning of Deism cannot be accurately defined. The men who developed the movement did not always entirely agree. It numbered such men as Toland, Tindal, Collins and Shaftesbury. The latter, for example, maintained a true sympathy for Christianity. His views were much like those of Channing as to the meaning of virtue and the importance of the ethical side of religion. The Deists in general were extreme rationalists. They were critical of history, tradition and revelation. They believed that God had created nature perfectly and that the reason of man could be relied upon to comprehend the Infinite. Thus, natural religion, they held was superior to revealed religion. The Deistic attitude in its respect for nature, man and human reason, is a part of Unitarianism. The Deists were to take a courageous attitude in respect to the ability of the mind to find God and to interpret the Scriptures aright. But here the resemblance ceases. About 1750, Deism overpowered by a host of Christian apologists, gradually lost itself in abstraction and faded away. Its good features, however, became a part of the liberal movement in America and contributed to its triumph half a century later.

In England, two men stand out as great forces in the early history of Unitarianism. Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808), led the revolt by organizing the first Unitarian Church in England in 1774. It became known as the Essex Street Chapel in London. Lindsey was a most fervent spiritual and religious force. Though he willingly suffered hardship and loss for conscience sake, he always shrank from controversy and avoided it whenever he could. Joseph Priestley (1733-1804) , became the leader of the English dissenting Churches which became openly Unitarian. Aside from his religious duties, his scientific endeavors were amazing. He was always a sincere, clear thinking, rationalist. Priestley would have been an honor to any movement. He was forced to face great criticism and opposition, which he always met with fearless courage. He spent the last ten years of his life in retirement in Pennsylvania where he started two Unitarian Churches. These were the first two outside of New England.

This in brief is the story of the beginnings of Unitarianism. From the first, it was the embodiment of the liberal attitude and the rationalistic approach. It had always a great respect for the Bible and the historic truths of Christianity. The movement in

America, for nearly two centuries, partook of the influences which I have indicated. It was a gradual development in the minds of many ministers within the Church. Whatever separation took place was usually initiated by the conservatives. Slowly and steadily the liberals were gaining strength. This was the situation at the close of the 18th century.

Channing has been termed the Martin Luther of American liberalism. It is certainly a fact that he gave voice to its sentiments, laid down its principles and united the scattered forces of liberalism under the Unitarian banner.

In this section we shall consider the contributions of Channing to the theological thought of New England. We shall consider, as impartially as possible, his cardinal theological views and then having them before us as clearly and as fully as we can envision them we shall consider their shortcomings, if any, in the light of the sacred Scriptures and Christian experience. We approach his doctrines in the spirit of seeking. Channing was a mind of rich gifts. He never spared his powers and the fruits of his efforts he freely offers, asking only that whatever we accept or reject be done with the broad-mindedness of true tolerance and Christian charity.

CHAPTER 111

CHANNING'S VIEW OF THE SCRIPTURES

In the Baltimore Sermon Channing departed from the usual type of ordination sermon to preach a doctrinal discourse on the principles of the Unitarians in interpreting the Scriptures and secondly, what some of the doctrines, so interpreted, express. Certainly the sermon created a sensation in this city which at that time was prone to regard Unitarian views with suspicion. At the outset of the discourse, Channing laid down the following principles for the interpretation of Scriptures. First, the Scriptures are divinely authoritative. They reveal God to mankind and particularly the most perfect revelation of His will by Jesus Christ. All the books are not given equal importance. The fullest revelation is to be found in the New Testament. The Scriptures are authoritative and given for our full instruction. The Scriptures unfold the divine perfections and pledge the divine faithfulness and fatherly love of God. The Scriptures are sufficient for our faith and practice, if rightly understood. This right understanding is important because a man, brought up in lands where Christianity is associated with corrupt practices, such as the Inquisition or

despotism and where the simplest critical helps are wanting, could hardly be expected to be able to sift the truths of Christian faith from the mazes of error. Infidelity is often rooted in circumstances of an unchristian environment. Then, too, the Scriptures must be thought of and understood as a message to men in the language of the men to whom it was spoken. The spiritual truth of the Scriptures abides though the men and the events which called them forth have disappeared. The Bible is the progressive revelation of the nature of God.

Channing maintained that the use of the reason was required for the right understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures.

"Were the Bible written in a language and style of its own, did it consist of words which admit but a single sense, and of sentences wholly detached from each other, there would be no place for the principles now laid down. We could not reason about it, as about other writings. But such a book would be of little worth; and perhaps, of all books, the Scriptures correspond least to this description. The word of God bears the stamp of the same hand which we see in His works. It has infinite connections and dependences. Every proposition is linked with others, and is to be compared with others, that its full and precise import may be understood. Nothing stands alone. The New Testament is built on the Old.Still more, the Bible treats of subjects on which we receive ideas from other sources besides itself. ...and it expects us to restrain and modify its language by the known truths which observation and experience furnish on these topics. We profess not to know a book which demands a more frequent exercise

of reason than the Bible."¹

Channing stresses the important principles of good exegesis. Language admits of various interpretations. Every word is to be studied with a view of determining what the writer was trying to say to the person to whom he was writing. The purpose, circumstances, and idioms of language are all to be considered in their bearing on the particular meaning of his words. Especially, in the Bible, Channing felt that reason should be used because the Book does not use the terminology of science or the precise language of definition. It uses the bold figures of poetry. Often we find books marked by the peculiarities of their writer or the mode of thought of a local custom or condition. The Bible requires our constant application of reason; our looking beyond the material and literal to spiritual truth that the new might be unfolded. Channing said,

"Need I descend to particulars to prove that the Scriptures demand the exercise of reason? Take, for example, the style in which they generally speak of God, and observe how habitually they apply to Him human passions and organs. Recollect the declarations of Christ, that he came not to send peace but a sword; that unless we eat his flesh and drink his blood we have no life in us; that we must hate father and mother,... Recollect the unqualified manner in which it is said of Christians that they possess all things,

¹"Unitarian Christianity", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 368.

know all things, and can do all things. Recollect the verbal contradiction between Paul and James, and the apparent clashing of some parts of Paul's writings with the general doctrines and end of Christianity.....Who does not see that we must limit all these passages by the known attributes of God, of Jesus Christ, so as to give the language a quite different import from what it would require had it been applied to different beings, or used in different connections."¹

The teachings of the Bible, interpreted by reason, in the sense that Channing thus indicated, may be found consistent with themselves and with the laws of nature. Channing felt that any doctrine that was out of harmony with known truth was to be distrusted."....God never contradicts in one part of Scripture what He teaches in another; never contradicts in revelation what He teaches in His works and providence."² Without the latitude that was commonly allowed the exercise of the reasoning faculties in determining the truth or error in any proposition or problem, Channing would not attempt to defend the divine authority of the Bible. These principles of reasoning, Channing contends, are not peculiar or original to the Unitarians. All sects and Christian groups use them in the formulation and defense of their creeds. Especially the Trinitarians, Channing pointed out were dependent

¹Ibid., pp. 368-369.

²Ibid., p. 369.

upon the reason for their dogmas and he did not differ with them on their use of it but for violating the fundamental rules of its use. They ingeniously ascribed exaggerated or mysterious meanings to detached texts. They sacrificed the plain to the obscure.

It was frequently charged by opponents of Unitarianism that such a system of belief was a 'Half-way house to infidelity'. Channing, of course, was the sincere defender of the reason, its validity, undepraved nature and its trustworthiness. One of his outstanding sermons was entitled, 'Christianity a Rational Religion'. Also in his Baltimore sermon we find him saying,

"We object strongly to the contemptuous manner in which reason is often spoken of by our adversaries, because it leads, we believe, to universal skepticism. If reason be so dreadfully darkened by the fall that its most decisive judgments on religion are unworthy of trust, then Christianity, and even natural theology, must be abandoned; for the existence and veracity of God, and the divine original of Christianity, are conclusions of reason, and must stand or fall with it. If revelation be at war with this faculty, it subverts itself, for the great question of its truth is left by God to be decided at the bar of reason.We honor revelation too highly to make it the antagonist of reason, or to believe that it calls us to renounce our highest powers."¹

The use of the reason in religion was accompanied with dangers. This was not denied. But it was no

¹Ibid., p. 369.

more dangerous than in other interests of life. It must be used rightly and patiently. Channing felt that as we had been created as rational beings we would be so judged by our creator.

"Revelation is addressed to us as rational beings. We may wish, in our sloth, that God had given us a system demanding no labor of comparing, limiting, and inferring. But such a system would be at variance with the whole character of our present existence; and it is the part of wisdom to take revelation as it is given to us, and to interpret it by the help of the faculties which it everywhere supposes, and on which it is founded."¹

Channing took up the objection that the wisdom of God being infinite, it would surpass all human reason. He refuted this by saying that an all wise Creator would not thus expose us to infinite error. Principles "...plainly repugnant to one another...."² or contrary to the nature of things, could not be accepted. Channing felt that God as an all wise teacher would not thus sport with our understanding. A good teacher unfolds the mind of a pupil by enlarging truths within the scope of the mind and by building confidence rather than filling the mind with distrust of its own powers. The Bible was written as a guide in the past as well as for the present and the future. We should expect revealed truth.

¹Ibid., p. 370.

²Ibid., p. 370.

"God's wisdom is a pledge that whatever is necessary for us and necessary for salvation is revealed too plainly to be mistaken, and too consistently to be questioned, by a sound and upright mind....A revelation is a gift of light. It cannot thicken our darkness and multiply our perplexities."¹

There are two other points Channing brought out relative to the reason which should have brief statement at this time. First, the validity of Christianity was to be decided at the bar of reason. Revelation is founded on reason. This is not to detract from the glory or necessity of revelation but to make us more reverent towards it. It is, at the same time, to elevate our regard for our rational nature. Reason is a gift, a light, it is God's image within us. Channing defended his position against the charge that it unduly exalted the intellect and ministered to undue pride of reason by saying that this reasoning faculty was the common property of all human beings and could not be considered a ground for personal distinctions. It was not a magnifying of personal powers but their unfolding through a sincere seeking for new light. In the sermon, "Christianity a Rational Religion", Channing without attempting a philosophical

¹Ibid., pp. 370-371.

definition comprehending all the exercises of reason, pointed out several of its main functions. First, it is capable of comprehending not only particular but universal truths. For example, if a stone falls to the ground, the mind not only perceives the particular truth, but also that here is a manifestation of a principle essential to all material creation. The reason not only comprehends material laws but those of the infinity of creation, the laws of goodness as they are exercised between man and man, and so from God to the humblest individual. Reason also applies the working of universal laws to particular lives and events. It is the reason which reduces our thoughts to unity and consistency. Whatever is inconsistent with the harmony of truth is marked as error. Revelation is in accord with reason, when unprejudiced and unmoved by pride or passion. "Revelation, then rests on reason, and in opposing it, would act for its own destruction."¹

Reason does not contradict a genuine revelation. Channing emphasized the care with which reason should be used in view of the gross errors of religious history. But it has been the reason itself which has detected those errors. Our ultimate reliance,

¹W. E. Channing, "Christianity a Rational Religion", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 237.

then, is upon our own reasoning faculties. They are of a kindred nature to God. Therefore, the infinity of God, far from calling upon us to prostrate or annihilate our reasoning faculty exalts our conception of it. God's infinity is source and pledge of our endless improvement.

Channing taught that the rational interpretation of the Scriptures teaches the distinguishing doctrines of the Unitarians. These doctrines are: first, the rectitude of God; second, the humanity of Christ; third, the infinite worth of man; fourth, the validity of the human mind as the interpreter of revelation.

The following texts have been selected as typical of Channing's sermons. Channing rationalized these texts.

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."
(1 Thessalonians 5: 21.)¹

"And Jesus answered him, the first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord; And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment." (Mark 12: 29, 30.)²

"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" (Matthew 17: 5.)³

¹Used as text of sermon, "Unitarian Christianity."

²Used as text of sermon, "Unitarian Christianity Most Favorable to Piety."

³Used as text of sermon, "Character of Christ."

"Honour all men." (11 Peter 2: 17.)¹

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,"
(Romans 1: 16.)²

"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear;
but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."
(11 Timothy 1: 7.)³

Our Savior, Jesus Christ, who hath abolished
death, and brought life and immortality to light
through the Gospel." (11 Timothy 1: 10.)⁴

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed
on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my
disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and
the truth shall make you free." "If the Son therefore
shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."
(John 11: 31, 32, 36.)⁵

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he
hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor;"
(Luke 4: 18.)⁶

"His word was with power." (Luke 4: 32.)⁷

¹Used as text of sermon, "Honor due to all Men."

²Used as text of sermon, "Evidences of Christianity,"
also for "Christianity a Rational Religion."

³Used as text of sermon, "The Great purpose of
Christianity."

⁴Used as text of sermon, "Immortality."

⁵Used as text of sermon, "Spiritual Freedom."

⁶Used as text of sermon, "Ministry for the Poor."

⁷Used as text of sermon, "The Christian Ministry."

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 7: 21.)¹

"Fools make a mock at sin." (Proverbs 14: 9.)²

"Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Isaiah 2: 4.)³

"The same came to Jesus by night and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." (John 3: 2.)⁴

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." (Ephesians 4:4.)⁵

"Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." (1 Peter 2: 21)⁶

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." (1 Corinthians 2: 12.)⁷

¹Part of the text of sermon, "The Church."

²Used as text of sermon, "The Evil of Sin."

³Used as text of discourse on, "War."

⁴Used as text of sermon, "Evidences of Revealed Religion."

⁵Used as text of sermon, "The Church Universal."

⁶Used as text of sermon, "The Imitableness of Christ's Character."

⁷Used as text of sermon, "Life a Divine Gift."

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5: 48.)¹

"Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice?....Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man." (Proverbs 8: 1,4.)²

¹Used as text of sermon, "The Perfecting Power of Religion."

²Used as text of sermon, "God revealed in The Universe and in Humanity."

CHAPTER IV
CHANNING'S VIEW OF GOD
THE UNITY OF GOD

In the theology of Channing, his cardinal doctrine was the unity of God, or that there is one God, and one only. He attributed to this doctrine infinite importance in its bearing upon Christian faith and piety. This doctrine opposes that of tritheism. It teaches one great object of our worship. It uplifts the soul to one personality of unbounded, undivided, unrivalled glory.

"To him it teaches the mind to rise through all beings. Around him it gathers all the splendours of the universe. To him it teaches us to ascribe whatever good we receive or behold, the beauty and magnificence of nature, the liberal gifts of Providence, the capacities of the soul, the bonds of society, and especially the riches of grace and redemption, the mission, and powers, and beneficent influences of Jesus Christ. All happiness, it traces up to the Father, as the sole source; and the mind, which these views have penetrated, through this intimate association of everything exciting and exalting in the universe with one Infinite Parent, can and does offer itself up to him with the intensest and profoundest love of which human nature is susceptible."¹

God is a distinct and intelligible object of worship. An infinite Father, though inexpressibly sublime, is the least perplexing of all possible

¹W. E. Channing, "Unitarian Christianity most Favorable to Piety.", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 387.

conceptions. This idea has analogies in everyday life, it is peculiarly understandable to the rational sense. The unity of God in its essential simplicity puts it within the reach of human thought and affection and fills it with power for the soul.

"The proposition that there is one God seems to us exceedingly plain. We understand by it that there is one being, one mind, one person, one intelligent agent, and one only, to whom underived and infinite perfection and dominion belong. We conceive that these words could have conveyed no other meaning to the simple and uncultivated people who were set apart to be the depositaries of this great truth, and who were utterly incapable of understanding those hairbreadth distinctions between being and person which the sagacity of later ages has discovered. We find no intimation that this language was to be taken in an unusual sense, or that God's unity was a quite different thing from the oneness of other intelligent beings."¹

Channing contends that the doctrine that there are three persons in the Godhead is not a fundamental doctrine of Christianity. He believes that the Scriptures teach the opposite view; that they distinguish the Father from the Son, teaching that, with Jesus, we should worship the Father as the only living and true God. Such verses of Scripture as the following are used to support this position. "...God sent forth his Son...."² "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me...."³ "...to us there is but one God, the Father,...."⁴

¹W. E. Channing, "Unitarian Christianity", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 371.

²Galatians 4: 4.

³Luke 4: 18.

⁴1 Corinthians 8: 6.

If the doctrine of the Trinity were of the importance that some attach to it, why should it not have been so emphasized and expressed by the Scriptures and the teachings of Jesus? Channing not only denies the existence of a single Scriptural verse teaching that the Godhead consists of three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost but that it labors to prevent such an interpretation of God's nature. The Scriptures constantly refer to the Father in the singular number and do so explicitly and clearly. This is so completely the case that when Trinitarians seek to express the doctrine in their creeds, inferred meanings are read into detached and obscure parts of Scripture to formulate a doctrine which cannot be sanctioned by Scripture as a whole.

Furthermore, when Christianity first came into the world, it was the subject of severe attack by its enemies and loyally defended in the apostolic writings. Surely the Jews would have detected the Trinity as an outstanding peculiarity of this new faith if it had been even so much as mentioned. But such teaching awakened no controversy.

It is one of the great excellencies of the doctrine of God's unity that it offers one supreme object for the worshipper's undivided adoration,

reverence and homage. Certainly Trinitarianism places man in an inescapable dilemma. He must worship three persons equally when it is his very nature to worship one supreme being. Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity weakens and detracts from man's worship of God. For, if Jesus Christ be made an equal deity and recipient of man's homage, it follows that the tendency would be to place Christ first in his affections. His coming to earth in the form of man, his personal work, his giving himself upon the cross, his sharing of human suffering and sorrow would place him in closer relationship to us than that of a deity who has always remained unseen. If Christ be equal with God, his intense suffering upon the cross, while it would naturally tend to focus the attention and sympathy of all upon these aspects, would not uplift the mind or spiritualize our moral sentiments in terms of our undivided adoration of a holy deity supreme in his perfections of love and rectitude.

Having thus subjected Trinitarianism to the searching analysis of reason and placed it in the category of a fiction, Channing proceeds to show that God's unity is not only a principle established by the reason but is traced in nature.

"When I consult nature with the lights modern

science affords, I see continually multiplying traces of the doctrine of One God. The more I extend my **researches** into nature, the more I see that it is a whole, the product of one wisdom, power and goodness. It bears witness to one Author; nor has its testimony been without effect; for, although the human mind has often multiplied its objects of worship, still it has always tended towards the doctrine of the divine unity, and has embraced it more and more firmly in the course of human improvement. The heathen, while he erected many altars, generally believed in one supreme divinity, to whom the inferior deities were subjected and from whom they sprung. Need I tell you of the harmony which subsists between nature and revelation in this particular? To Christianity belongs the glory of having proclaimed this primitive truth with new power, and of having spread it over the whole civilized world."¹

The spirituality of God is preserved by this principle of unity. "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."² We criticize the Catholics for their paintings and statuary, but in what respect are the teachings of the Trinitarians different? A direct result of Trinitarianism is to materialize our conceptions of God. The doctrine of the infinite divinity clothed in a human body and being put to death upon a cross would not have found a place in the mythology of paganism. To think of God revealing himself as a material being in the form of man debases the spiritual nature of God. By the teachings of Moses,

¹W. E. Channing, "Christianity a Rational Religion", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 240

²John 4: 24. Quoted in "Unitarian Christianity Most Favorable to Piety", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 388.

the Jews were especially forbidden the representation of God, in the likeness of any creature, or to make him any graven image. This prohibition was laid upon the Jews because God had never revealed himself in any material form. The embodying of the Supreme Being in the form of Christ, the God-man, which is the essence of Trinitarianism does not elevate spiritual virtues. Man's interest becomes focused upon his human attributes. This dims the splendor of the spiritual character of God.

".....Just as far as corporeal or limited attributes enter into our conception of him, we remove him from us. He becomes an outward, distant being, instead of being viewed and felt as dwelling in the soul itself. It is an unspeakable benefit of the doctrine of a purely spiritual God, that He can be regarded as inhabiting, filling our spiritual nature; and, through this union with our minds, He can and does become the object of an intimacy and friendship such as no embodied being can call forth."¹

GOD, A MIND

One of Channing's important conceptions of God was in terms of mind. It was based on the reasonable assumption of man's possession of a like nature to God. Answering the question, Where do we get our conceptions and knowledge of the attributes of the Supreme Being?, Channing answered that man derives

¹W. E. Channing, "Unitarian Christianity Most Favorable to Piety", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 389.

them from his own soul. Man has within him the elements of divinity. What man knows of God are the ideas of his own spiritual nature, purified and raised to an infinite degree. We bear the likeness of a kindred nature with God. An illustration of this is the resemblance of a parent to a child. God is a mind because the being we call God has meaning for us only through our consciousness and knowledge of ourselves. The faculties, such as thought and intelligence, which we possess are ascribed to God. "God is another name for human intelligence raised above all error and imperfection, and extended to all possible truth."¹

Channing believed that this was the way man comes to a knowledge of God's attributes and moral perfection. To know God's goodness, to know the purity and nature of the divine philanthropy is to have a heart from which all impurity and selfishness have been expelled by love. It is conscience which interprets for us the virtuous character of God and the evil of sin; it is the lawgiver in our own breast which gives us our sense of divine authority and teaches us obedience to the Holy Will.

¹W. E. Channing, "Likeness to God", 1st. Edit., pamphlet, 1828, p. 10. (Also, Works, p. 293.)

"Men, as by a natural inspiration, have agreed to speak of conscience as the voice of God, as the Divinity within us.....Without this inward law we should be as incapable of receiving a law from Heaven as the brute. Without this the thunders of Sinai might startle the outward ear, but would have no meaning, no authority to the mind. I have here expressed a great truth. Nothing teaches so encouragingly our relation and resemblance to God; for the glory of the Supreme Being is eminently moral. We blind ourselves to his chief splendor if we think only or mainly of his power, and overlook those attributes of rectitude and goodness to which He subjects his omnipotence, and which are the foundations and very substance of his universal and immutable law. And are these attributes revealed to us through the principles and convictions of our own souls? Do we understand through sympathy God's perception of the right, the good, the holy, the just? Then with what propriety is it said that in his own image He made man!"¹

Channing strongly believed the principle that the existence of God was a valid conclusion of the reason. Though he admitted that the use of reason in religion is attended with dangers, he felt that the failure to use it was still more dangerous. He strongly opposed those who contended that its use led to sin.

"If reason be so dreadfully darkened by the fall that its most decisive judgments on religion are unworthy of trust, then Christianity, and even natural theology, must be abandoned; for the existence and veracity of God, and the divine original of Christianity, are conclusions of reason, and must stand or fall with it. If revelation be at war with this faculty, it subverts itself, for the great question of its truth is left by God to be decided

¹Ibid., p. 11. (Also ,Works, pp.293-294.)

at the bar of reason."¹

Channing held revelation to be a most honorable principle. His objections to both revelation and skepticism were based upon the fact that extreme views from each of these opposite positions were inimical to the highest views of human nature and tended to shake confidence in our own faculties. The history of mankind supports the theory that men may put too little trust in their own faculties. To be thus timid is to hinder human progress and betray the interests of Christianity, as much as too much boldness in one's thinking.

God as a mind is not only a conclusion of man's reason, but the nature of the Divine Being is ultimately recognizable by means of this instrument. If our minds are of such character that they cannot be relied upon to detect the truth from falsehood, good from evil, this would of necessity nullify all progress, unsettle all belief. But the nature of things does not support this view. Religion, indeed, contradicts it, teaching that our faculties may be trusted for the highest employments. Nothing is gained in the cause of piety if we take a degrading

¹W. E. Channing, "Unitarian Christianity", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 369.

view of human nature, for in the capability of our nature to know and judge of God, true piety has its foundation. In discerning the attributes of God by reason the fact that we are prone to err does not mean we should forsake it. Because money is often misused and does great evil, one does not condemn money as evil when it is rightly used for the purpose that was intended. That our eyes sometimes deceive us, or cannot clearly distinguish objects, does not mean we should pluck them out that we might walk in darkness. How much better reason, unconfined by a creed, is capable of an increasing understanding of the Infinite God.

God delights to diffuse Himself everywhere. We discern his glory in the splendors of the universe and in all forms of life. His attributes are known by those in man. We think of God as infinite, because we possess capacities and aspirations which are unlimited and which only an unbounded God can satisfy. How far the Infinite Being imparts his attributes to intelligent beings is a question. The operations, ends, and means of God, being unlimited, are incomprehensible. They cannot be embraced as a whole by the human mind. But this does not mean that what light we have is not the true light, or

what knowledge we gain is not the truth. The mind of God being infinite cannot wholly be comprehended even by the highest angel or by Christ, but still the truths and lessons we discern within the sphere of our understandings are just as valid as though they were infinitely enlarged. A tiny sunbeam entering the darkness of a room is of the same nature as the sun. A man who gives a beggar a penny illustrates the essential nature of charity though we see it in many more enlarged forms. So, though we see very little, that little is as true as though everything else were seen and greater discoveries must agree with and support it.

"Should the whole order and purposes of the universe be opened to us, it is certain that nothing would be disclosed which would in any degree shake our persuasion that the earth is inhabited by rational and moral beings, who are authorized to expect from their Creator the most benevolent and equitable government. No extent of observation can unsettle those primary and fundamental principles of moral truth which we derive from our highest faculties operating in the relations in which God has fixed us. In every region and period of the universe, it will be as true as it is now on the earth that knowledge and power are the measures of responsibility, and that natural incapacity absolves from guilt.....Harmony and consistency are the characters of God's administration, and all our researches into the universe only serve to manifest its unity, and to show a wider operation of the laws which we witness and experience on earth."¹

¹W. E. Channing, "The Moral Argument Against Calvinism", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 463.

Channing considered that one Supreme Being as an object of our worship was not only a more intelligible doctrine than Trinitarianism, but supplied a more intelligible means for the understanding of God's nature. He considered Trinitarianism a riddle, a fiction, a misuse of the reasoning powers. On the other hand, he held up the simplicity of the Unitarian doctrine, its lack of perplexing elements and its teaching of the nearness of God's relationship to all his creatures. He granted that God was incomprehensible in the sense of the grandeur of His Infinite Being and mystery. However, he stressed the importance of the intelligibility of God. Though we do not know His whole nature, still we have clear facts, testified to by revelation, reason, and experience, and we can reason from these known facts as validly as from any other relationships of knowledge. We do not know the deeper meanings or secrets of the simplest plant or animal, yet we do not discredit our knowledge of them as untrustworthy. Just as we become acquainted with our fellow creatures in terms of a growing fellowship and understanding, so we grow in the knowledge of our Creator. We come through experience to know a neighbor's honesty or goodness. Just so in religion, we move from the

action to the agent.

"If this reasoning be sound (and all religion rests upon it), then God's justice and goodness are intelligible attributes, agreeing essentially with the same qualities in ourselves. Their operation, indeed, is infinitely wider, and they are employed in accomplishing not only immediate but remote and unknown ends. Of consequence, we must expect that many parts of the divine administration will be obscure, that is, will not produce immediate good, and an immediate distinction between virtue and vice. But still the unbounded operation of these attributes does not change their nature. They are still the same as if they acted in the narrowest sphere."¹

Not only is the character of God such as to be an intelligible object of man's worship, but every man's elevation depends chiefly upon his conception of this Supreme Being. To attain a just, bright and quickening view of God is the highest aim of thought. The principle within human nature, from which man's idea of God and all religious aspiration springs, is the desire to establish relation with a being more perfect than itself. The ultimate end of all life and revelation is to unfold in us the idea of God. The following statement of this point was preached to the laboring classes and it is stated so simply I shall quote his words.

"Much earnest, patient, laborious thought is required to see this Infinite Being as He is, to rise above the low, gross notions of the Divinity, which rush in upon us from our passions, from our

¹Ibid., p. 464.

selfish partialities, and from the low-minded world around us. There is one view of God particularly suited to elevate us. I mean the view of Him as the 'Father of our spirits;' as having created us with great powers to grow up to perfection; as having ordained all outward things to minister to the progress of the soul; as always present to inspire and strengthen us, to wake us up to inward life, and to judge and rebuke our wrong-doing; as looking with parental joy on our resistance of evil; as desiring to communicate himself to our minds forever."¹

Thus a quickened knowledge of God is the measure of moral progress. Then, as the moral life is developed by our resistance to evil we become capable of fuller conceptions of God.

GOD AS A SUPREME AND PERFECT BEING

Channing lived in meditation and fellowship with God. Endowed with a strong mystic spirit, he had great gifts of reason and analysis combined with an ardent nature. The greatest object of interest to religious men is the character of the Deity, and Channing was no exception. As a boy of twelve, the thought of a God who condemned men to everlasting punishment filled his mind with horror. And as his mind developed and wisdom came with mature experience, all fed the stream of his most important thought, a God supreme and perfect in all His ways. This idea occupied his hours when as a young student he

¹W. E. Channing, Lecture, "On the Elevation of the Laboring Classes", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 48.

pondered upon great things, pen in hand. Underlying every sermon of his ministry is this all embracing faith in the rectitude and excellence of the character of God. God's supreme holiness, His majesty and perfection, commanded the utter adoration and worship of Channing's mind and heart and soul. His great objection to the Trinity was on the grounds that it placed other beings in equal position with God, or at least, detracted from the majestic oneness of God's claim upon us. In his Baltimore Sermon he spoke of nothing else with greater stress. He mentioned the moral perfection of God as the chief attribute of His character and pointed out that the greatest claim of Christianity to our following is that it asserts the venerable and moral attributes of God. But to ascribe to God supremacy and perfection is not to raise him because of his sovereignty above the eternal laws of rectitude and equity to which all other beings are subjected. In no other being was the sense of right so commanding, so omnipotent, as in God. Channing could not bow in worship to any sovereign, material or spiritual who governed with tyranny. He paid allegiance to God because his will was perfection of virtue. Not because God was creator, or king, but because of

His infinite rectitude and goodness did he receive Channing's fullest veneration. He worshipped a God of absolute, unbounded, eternal, omnipotent rectitude and love. One of the sublime characteristics of the Supreme Being is that He communicates Himself, His most glorious self, His own spirit to His worshippers. Like a father, God delights to give gifts. His greatest gift is Himself. As a Spirit He is an eternal presence, pervading, penetrating our very souls. He is so near, so inward, so deep, as to be unrecognized by our human, imperfect consciousness. He is in immediate, fullest contact with us, to share, to influence, to communicate to us His divinity.

"In regard to the spiritual influence by which God brings the created spirit into conformity to his own, I would that I could speak worthily. It is gentle, that it may not interfere with our freedom. It sustains, mingles with, and moves all our faculties. It acts through nature, providence, revelation, society, and experience; and the Scriptures, confirmed by reason and the testimonies of the wisest and best men, teach us that it acts still more directly. God, being immediately present to the soul, holds immediate communion with it, in proportion as it prepares itself to receive and to use aright the heavenly inspiration. He opens the inward eye to himself, communicates secret monitions of duty, revives and freshens our convictions of truth, builds up our faith in human immortality, unseals the deep, unfathomed fountains of love within us, instils strength, peace, and comfort, and gives victory over pain, sin and death."¹

In a grand sermon on 'the Church' which he

¹W. E. Channing, "Christian Worship", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 417.

delivered in Philadelphia in 1841, he avowed membership with the universal church, and that nothing could separate him from it. He disclaimed being an enemy of any church however. He exposed the error of the Roman Catholic Church in that it tended to an idolatrous importance of the church. The impartation of God's spirit is not through any institution as such, nor through the use of any words, signs or outward rites. The great principle of the divine communications is that God gives of his spirit freely to those who do his will. This act needs no institution or intermediary as priest.

"....God....giveth grace to the humble."¹

He, "....giveth His Holy Spirit to them that ask him."²

The supreme perfections of God are known and written on our souls. We have already mentioned the fact which Channing staunchly taught that man has the ability, limited, of course, though with the potentiality of enlargement, of discerning the perfections of God by his human powers. The sense of our constant dependence upon God cannot be too deep. However, this does not interfere with our moral power or our moral freedom. This power is ours as a gift from God. He, also, gives us

¹1 Peter 5: 5. "The Church", 1883 Edit., p. 440.

²Luke 11: 13. "The Church", 1883 Edit., p. 440.

abundantly of His Spirit, and imparts of His spiritual aid without which perfection would be impossible for us. This truth is illustrated by the use man makes of mechanical inventions to perform achievements, impossible by his unaided strength. Just so in religion, worship, communion at Christ's table, coöperation in deeds of charity, we absorb and assimilate much help from others. Christianity teaches that in addition to all these human helps we need the infinite influence of God, and it also teaches that this divine aid is even closer to our hand than the help of human beings. Prayer may be made for it at any time. If such help is sincerely asked for in prayer, it shall be granted in full measure.

Revelation, Channing holds, is not our first instructor. God is revealed in the Universe and in humanity. There are many preparations for a communication from Heaven.

"Revelation does not find the mind a blank, a void, prepared to receive unresistingly whatever may be offered; but finds it in possession of various knowledge from nature and experience, and, still more, in possession of great principles, fundamental truths, moral ideas, which are derived from itself, and which are the germs of all its future improvement. This last view is peculiarly important. The mind does not receive everything from abroad. Its great ideas arise from itself, and by those native lights it reads and comprehends the volumes of nature and

revelation. We speak, indeed, of nature and revelation as making known to us an Intelligent First Cause; but the ideas of Intelligence and causation we derive originally from our own nature. The elements of the idea of God we gather from ourselves. Power, wisdom, love, virtue, beauty, and happiness, - words which contain all that is glorious in the universe and interesting in our existence, - express attributes of the mind, and are understood by us only through the consciousness....Christianity recognizes them, is built on them, and needs them as its interpreters."¹

The perfection of the character of God is maintained by Unitarianism by its conception of the essential unity of His nature. It appeals to the higher, spiritual feelings of man. Trinitarism, with its materializing of God in Christ, and by distracting the attention to his suffering and death upon a cross, dims the splendor of God as a spiritually supreme being.

According to Channing, Unitarianism asserts the absolute and unlimited perfection of God. Surely, the idea of God taught by a religion influences the whole system. To becloud the full splendor of God's perfection is like blotting out the sun. The Unitarian view of God on this basis is more conducive to Christian piety and virtue than views which by multiplying the persons and dividing the offices of the Godhead interfere with the sublime conception

¹"Christianity a Rational Religion", Works, 1883 Edit., pp. 235-236.

of one infinite person, in whom all glory is perfectly concentrated.

Considering the errors of Calvinism, Channing said,

"....we look with horror and grief on the views of God's government which are naturally and intimately united with Trinitarianism. They take from us our Father in heaven, and substitute a stern and unjust lord. Our filial love and reverence rise up against them. We say to the Trinitarian, touch anything but the perfections of God. Cast no stain on that spotless purity and loveliness. We can endure any errors but those which subvert or unsettle the conviction of God's paternal goodness. Urge not upon us a system which makes existence a curse and wraps the universe in gloom. Leave us the cheerful light, the free and healthful atmosphere of a liberal and rational faith; the ennobling and consoling influences of the doctrine, which nature and revelation in blessed concord teach us, of one Father of unbounded and inexhaustible love".¹

Channing taught that the purpose of God is to perfect the human soul, to raise the soul from the power of moral evil to perfection; this is the one great, central principle, the beginning and the end of Christianity. Channing believed that the Christian religion satisfies the needs of all human beings in that it brings to them the means of elevation from their imperfections, sins and temptations, which is the plan of God revealed and accomplished by Christ that man might be lifted to a diviner condition.

¹"Unitarian Christianity Most Favorable to Piety", Works, 1883 Edit., pp. 391-392.

When man's needy condition is considered, together with the possibilities that lie within his reach, there can be no worthwhile end but moral perfection. If we cannot have any reasonable hope of this then we have no prospect worthy the name of happiness. But because perfection by God's wisdom and love has been placed within our reach we have the means of attainment of the gospel's revelation of "unsearchable riches"¹, through the love, "which passeth knowledge".²

It is the glorious nature of Christianity, Channing held, that it offers us this felicity and promises us its realization. The excellence of goodness is the supreme aim to be cherished on earth or in heaven. No other heaven than a state embodied in our own attainment of moral perfection would be worth living for. God is tempted in the glories of His creation. But the most sacred sanctuary of His abiding, is that temple not made with hands, even the soul of man which is destined for a glory more enduring than earth or heaven.

GOD A UNIVERSAL FATHER

Channing, having drawn from his experience of life and knowledge of himself, and interpreted these

¹Ephesians 3: 8.

²Ephesians 3: 19.

experiences and this knowledge to deduce the lofty thoughts of God's unity, intelligibility and perfection, now lifts his mind to the all-inclusive doctrine of God's universal fatherhood. The general theme of his sermon entitled, "Christianity a Rational Religion" is that men are rational beings and that Christianity supplies the deepest want of their natures by harmonizing confusing appearances, and disclosing a unity of purpose in the seemingly hostile dispensations of providence, by opening to the mind the great, reconciling principle of the world as order, beauty and benevolent design.

"Christianity, revealing as it does, the unbounded mercy of God to his sinful creatures; revealing an endless futurity, in which the inequalities of the present state are to be redressed, and which reduces by its immensity the sorest pains of life to light and momentary evils; revealing a moral perfection which is worth all pain and conflicts, and which is most effectually and gloriously won amidst suffering and temptation; revealing in Jesus Christ the sublimity and rewards of tried and all-enduring virtue;.... Christianity, I say, by these revelations, has poured a flood of light over nature and providence, and harmonized the infinite complexity of the works and ways of God."¹

Channing not only claimed the character of consistency as a mark of Christianity, but also claimed for it the quality of universality. It is

¹"Christianity a Rational Religion", Works, 1883 Edit., pp. 241-242.

limited by nothing narrow, temporary or local; it bears the stamp of no particular age or country. It speaks to the immortal in man rather than the perishable. It directs the mind to an infinite goodness.

Channing believed the universal fatherhood of God was one of Christianity's peculiar and distinctive principles. He drew from this his views of the equality of all men and the universality of truth.

Channing has left us many lofty and important thoughts on the fatherhood of God. Few men have conceived of a closer relationship between God and man. He said men often attempted to honor God by placing Him on a vague and distant throne rather than honoring him because of his parental goodness and nearness. To think of a stern, unpardoning Deity, who enforces an obedience He gives no power to perform, who prefers His own honor to the welfare of His creatures, is to strip God of His essential glory and man of his truest dignity. The attitude of worship and faith that we find in Jesus depicts the noblest sentiments of human nature. Through Jesus we may come to God in happy adoration. He has revealed to us the Father. Jesus gave to man a new relationship with God. Thereafter we know our filial communion with Him. Jesus, because of his life and the great virtue of his relationship with God and man, revealed those

precious, and attractive attributes of the Father, so that he was able to say, "...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father...."¹ To think of God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as our Father, helps us approach Him with the confidence and eagerness of children.

Channing felt that nothing is more important than our possession of a true understanding of God's parental relation to us. It is essential to Christian worship and sheds light on the whole subject of religion. To think of God as the Creator of all life is surely a high conception. But God is more than this, for we do not call the creator of a mountain, or plant, Father. The artist is not thought of as father of his statue, or the mechanic, father of the machine he assembles. A father communicates to his child a life and nature like his own. We are not wholly flesh. Were this true, we could not call God, Father. John tells us that God is a spirit. Our consciousness says that we are spirits too. We have a higher power within us than the material. We are conscious of greater faculties than the physical. There are countless evidences that man is more than the brute, that he possesses infinite spiritual powers, that

¹John 14: 9.

he is capable of great thoughts, even that he has been created in God's image to be a son of the Father forever.

"In the New Testament, God is made known to us as a Father;....Our whole religion is to take its character from this view of the Divinity.....And what is it to be a father? It is to communicate one's own nature, to give life to kindred beings; and the highest function of a father is to educate the mind of the child, and to impart to it what is noblest and happiest in his own mind.....This name belongs to God because He frames spirits like Himself and delights to give them what is most glorious and blessed in His own nature.....Separate from God this idea of his creating and training up beings after His own likeness, and you rob Him of the paternal character."¹

There are three considerations that Channing unfolds from the thought of God as father; it ascribes to God peculiar attributes; it ascribes to Him the parental relation and the disposition of a parent, it ascribes to God also a paternal divinity. God's influence is exerted in us to conform the soul to Himself, to make it worthy of its divine parentage and immortal fellowship. In a word, Channing says that, Christians are to worship God as their spiritual parent, as the father of their spirits, whose great purpose is their spiritual perfection, and their participation in a divine nature.

¹W. E. Channing, "Likeness to God", 1st. Edit. Pamphlet, 1828, p. 18. Also in Works, 1883 Edit., p. 296.

In the Baltimore Sermon delivered in 1819 at the ordination of Jared Sparks as pastor of the First Unitarian Church, Channing set forth the leading principles of Unitarianism as well as the opposing views of God and said, choose between them. This sermon, entitled, "Unitarian Christianity", was published and republished not only in English but in many other tongues. It was considered the most sensational and widely read pamphlet ever published in America, second, only, to Webster's reply to Hayne. It was received as the platform, or constitution, of Unitarianism. In this sermon, he summarizes his doctrine of God,

"To give our views of God in one word, we believe in his parental character. We ascribe to him not only the name, but the disposition and principles of a father. We believe that He has a father's concern for his creatures, a father's desire for their improvement, a father's equity in proportioning his commands to their powers, a father's joy in their progress, a father's readiness to receive the penitent, and a father's justice for the incorrigible. We look upon this world as a place of education, in which He is training men by prosperity and adversity, by aids and obstructions, by conflicts of reason and passion, by motives to duty and temptations to sin, by a various discipline suited to free and moral beings, for union with himself, and for a sublime and evergrowing virtue in heaven."¹

Channing taught that God is like a father to each individual. We are to think of the Creator not

¹"Unitarian Christianity", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 377.

as strangers but as children. We must relate in our conception of Him, the two thoughts of a particular and a universal providence. He combines the majesty of a universal sovereign and the tender care of a father. Such is God. He is God of all, yet the God of each one. He is universal father, of the Jew and the Gentile, the rich and the poor, the good and the evil. God is impartial. He has one law, one love, for all.

We have been thinking of Channing's view of God's care for man. We might well ask regarding his view of each individual's duties to God. We have several discourses from Channing of a pedagogical nature, treating of education in the Sunday School, the home, institutions of learning, etc. Channing's work entitled, "The Duties of Children" was sympathetic, simple, helpful; in it Channing is considered by many to have been at his best. As an appendix to his discourse entitled, "The Sunday School", we find twenty-one paragraphs in the form of a catechism, teaching the elements of religion and morality. While these rules were written chiefly as a guide to the training of children, they set forth Channing's central thoughts regarding the duties of all Christians. This catechism is found in his Works,¹

¹Works, 1834 Edit., pp. 336-337.

Channing's central doctrine of the fatherly beneficence of God teaches the communication of God to men through various attributes. As we have already quite fully considered his fatherly nature, which is the foundation of these, we shall but mention some of the most important attributes of the Deity as Channing set them forth.

The first question in the catechism outlined by Channing is, Who made you? The answer is, of course, that God made all created things. God, the Creator, is revealed in terms of beauty, both in man and in nature. Channing taught that God, as Creator, was unrestricted and infinite in all his ways. Miracles attest and prove the sovereignty of the mind of God over material things. The human mind possesses a God given light by which it may discover the nature of God through his works. There is no limit to man's ability to see and to lay hold upon God's reality. Channing held that man, endowed as he is by the Creator with powers which are to grow and expand forever, requires an infinite object of worship. Channing pointed out the infinite unity which is the very essence of God's creating work. Man's part is that of a colaborer with God in all His activities. Channing believed that a merely

mechanical universe would leave God's purpose unfulfilled. God is not limited or partial to any race, place or time. Channing's view of the Creator was that He manifests Himself in terms of universal, impartial goodness and that all who sincerely seek Him may appropriate the divine goodness and become like Him.

The second question of the catechism is, What does God give you? The answer is that all we have comes from God. Our life, strength, hope and happiness flow from the fountain of God's infinite love. He is the great benefactor of humanity. Man's true power consists in his ability to use the assistance of others and especially to seek and use the spiritual influences of God. Happiness is not to be derived from ourselves but from God. Human happiness is in proportion to the possession of God's purity, power and grace, rather than in the possession of material things. Religion is not so much an outward profession as it is an inner possession. The infinite felicity of unfolding love at work in human hearts is the truest and most abiding happiness.

As Christians, Channing taught, we may rejoice that God as sovereign and lord of all creation does not forget the individual. No words can describe

the full relationship of the Creator with his creatures. Infinite and intimate is His nearness to each one. He is vitally and helpfully present with us, delighting in our virtues, strengthening our weaknesses, and sorrowing for our sins. Channing said, "The great design of Jesus Christ is to teach us to see God everywhere, in Nature, in Providence, and in the Human Soul."¹ Surely Channing's was a deep consciousness of that unfathomable presence in whom we live and move and have our being. Channing pointed to the moral effects which are derived from the view of God's omnipresence. Not only is the sense of God's nearness renewed, but we have a new idea of human nature. The confidence that an omnipresent, perfect Creator is working with us strengthens our faith in our heavenly destiny and perfection. It is the signature of God upon our souls, claiming us as His own; the promise that our true end is a growing likeness unto Himself.

God sees all and knows all, Channing taught. He upheld the importance of the conscience, but pointed out that religion does not create the conscience. All men, whether good or evil, have some sense of right

¹W. E. Channing, "The Perfect Life", Boston, 1873, p. 20.

and wrong. But when the conception of an infinitely omniscient presence of rectitude and goodness shines within the mind with pure and quickening flame, we know that without the approval of God there can be no happiness. Our conscience is the monitor of the soul. God uplifts and inspires us to obey the voice of the conscience. God is the all-seeing one, the inspector of the conscience.

God in His great goodness watches over the world and though the slowness of the victory discourages us, as though the enemy never fainted ~~or~~ nor failed ~~and~~ our labor and wounds be vain, still we may confidently leave the issue to the wise and holy providence of Him who does not err, but who, Channing assures us, rewards every sincere effort we make for self-improvement and the attainment of the Kingdom of God upon earth.

Channing taught that the personality of the infinite being is characterized by infinite goodness, rectitude and perfection and he indicated the means by which man may approach such a grand and holy being. Channing taught with sincere conviction and positiveness that men possess the qualities of goodness, purity and love, together with the capacity of enlarging these qualities. These virtues, Channing believed, did not lose their essential nature through enlargement, otherwise in

an infinite being they would be unintelligible to man. But, because they do not change, the seeds of goodness and infinity in man may expand forever under God's gracious influence until human selfishness and sin have been swallowed up in divine love and holiness. This is to attain that perfection which is the purpose of religion, the plan of God and the end of man.

Channing said that,

"We believe that God is infinitely good, kind, benevolent, in the proper sense of these words,- good in disposition as well as in act; good not to a few, but to all; good to every individual, as well as to the general system."¹

Channing proclaimed that love is the fundamental attribute of God. It is the motivating principle of His ways. The strength, tenderness and depth of a human parent's attachment but shadow forth the love of our divine parent. It is a love that elevates, forms, and educates, for the child is destined for immortality in a sphere where love is enthroned triumphantly over all. In his fatherly love, God exercises parental authority. He commands as well as blesses. His commands are his chief blessings. What is more inflexible than the principle of the

¹"Unitarian Christianity", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 376.

disinterested benevolence of God which enjoins our obedience and encourages our imitation. A principle that Channing never failed to emphasize in his sermons was that God is the father of all. He is personally interested in each one of his children. A man who attains the conception that he, as a person, is endowed with perpetual growth and worth, has caught hold of a spiritual principle of vital practicality. In the love of God, the sinner finds hope.

"Unitarianism promotes piety by meeting the wants of man as a sinner. The wants of the sinner may be expressed almost in one word. He wants assurances of mercy in his Creator. He wants pledges that God is love in its purest form, that is, that He has a goodness so disinterested, free, full, strong and immutable, that the ingratitude and disobedience of His creatures cannot overcome it. This unconquerable love, which in Scripture is denominated grace, and which waits not for merit to call it forth, but flows out to the most guilty, is the sinner's only hope, and it is fitted to call forth the most devoted gratitude."¹

Channing taught that God is just, good and benevolent in all His ways. Having made the statement that God is just, Channing said,

"By this attribute we understand God's infinite regard to virtue or moral worth expressed in a moral government; that is, in giving excellent and equitable laws, and in conferring such rewards, and inflicting such punishments, as are best fitted to secure their observance. God's justice has for its end the highest virtue of the creation, and it punishes for this end

¹"Unitarian Christianity Most Favorable to Piety", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 395.

alone; and thus it coincides with benevolence; for virtue and happiness, though not the same, are inseparably conjoined."¹

The justice of God, Channing taught, is immutable.

In Channing's day, the justice and mercy of God were not universally considered as kindred attributes of God. In satisfying divine justice, God was not always considered to have acted with mercy. Channing thought of these two attributes as seeking the same end and being of the same quality. In one of his sermons, Channing says,

"In truth, Unitarianism asserts so strongly the mercy of God, that the reproach thrown upon it is that it takes from the sinner the dread of punishment, - a reproach wholly without foundation; for our system teaches that God's mercy is not an instinctive tenderness, which cannot inflict pain, but an all-wise love, which desires the true and lasting good of its object, and consequently desires first for the sinner that restoration to purity without which shame and suffering, and exile from God and heaven are of necessity and unalterably his doom. Thus Unitarianism holds forth God's grace and forgiving goodness most resplendently; by this manifestation of Him, it tends to awaken a tender and confiding piety; an ingenuous love, which mourns that it has offended; an ingenuous aversion to sin, not because sin brings punishment, but because it separates the mind from this merciful Father."²

¹"Unitarian Christianity", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 376.

²"Unitarian Christianity Most Favorable to Piety", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 396.

CHAPTER V
CHANNING'S VIEW OF CHRIST

In his Baltimore sermon entitled, "Unitarian Christianity", Channing set forth definitely and clearly his view of the unity of Christ. In the first place, Jesus was a being distinct from God, truly one mind, one soul, as truly one personality as any other person. Channing could not accept tritheism on the grounds that it was unscriptural, ambiguous, and detrimental to the thought of one divine being as the supreme object of our worship. In the second place, Channing could not reconcile as reasonable and scriptural, the doctrine that Jesus was both God and man. This was to give him the character of two persons, one human, the other divine.

"Now we maintain that this is to make Christ two beings. To denominate him one person, one being, and yet to suppose him made up of two minds, infinitely different from each other, is to abuse and confound language, and to throw darkness over all our conceptions of intelligent natures. According to the common doctrine, each of these two minds in Christ has its own consciousness, its own will, its own perceptions.....The doctrine that one and the same persons should have two consciousnesses, two wills, two souls, infinitely different from each other, we think an enormous tax on human credulity."¹

Channing contended that the doctrine which

¹"Unitarian Christianity", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 373.

describes Jesus as having both human and divine properties should have been set forth with clear distinctness in the Scriptures, but no such teaching is found. Jesus never implied that he spoke at times as God and again as a human being. But those who propose the doctrine of Christ as two beings have labored vague scripture texts and by their explanations have set forth hypotheses truly labyrinthine in their conjecture and inexplicability.

Naturally, as Channing was a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ, some aspect of Christ's life and work was always the content of his message. Channing was not a willing controversialist. However, when he felt challenged to speak he spoke firmly and decisively. He spoke the plain truth as he felt and saw it. His difficulty with Trinitarian views of the dual personality of Christ led him to speak his own views very plainly in the year 1819. Two of his outstanding sermons during that year are "Unitarian Christianity", and "Objections to Unitarian Christianity Considered". Though, few have ever felt greater regard and veneration for the character of Christ, Channing could not rank him equal with God, but thought of him as the best

of all God's created beings, but a distinct, and inferior being to the supreme deity. Though we find this expressed in several discourses, it is most concisely said in the sermon entitled,

'Objections to Unitarian Christianity Considered'.

"We maintain that Christ and God are distinct beings, two beings, not one and the same being.... Trinitarianism teaches that Jesus Christ is the supreme and infinite God, and that he and his Father are not only one in affection, counsel and will, but are strictly and literally one and the same being. Now to us this doctrine is most unscriptural and irrational. We say that the Son cannot be the same being with his own Father; that he, who was sent into the world to save it, cannot be the living God who sent him. The language of Jesus is explicit and unqualified. 'I came not to do mine own will'.--'I came not from myself'--- 'I came from God'. Now we affirm, and this is our chief heresy, that Jesus was not and could not be the God from whom he came, but was another being;.... The doctrine that this Jesus was the supreme God Himself, and the same being with his Father, this seems to us a contradiction to reason and Scripture so flagrant, that the simple statement of it is a sufficient refutation."¹

Channing believed that the great aim of the whole life and work of Jesus was to exalt God, the Father. Whenever he spoke of Him, he was referring to God, not to himself. A doctrine giving Jesus equal rank with God is not a part of the teachings of Jesus. Such a doctrine exalts Jesus at the expense of the Father.

¹"Objections to Unitarian Christianity Considered", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 402.

Channing's view of Christ's humiliation was not that it was just his human part, as small, when compared with his divine part as a drop compared with the ocean, but that Jesus's suffering was,

"Real and entire, that the whole Saviour, and not a part of him, suffered, that his crucifixion was a scene of deep and unmixed agony."¹

The Unitarians recognized but one mind in the dying Jesus. Channing condemned the Trinitarian doctrine of an infinite atonement, based on the view that an infinite being suffered for the sins of men. Channing terms such language "....an imposition on common minds, and very derogatory to God's justice,...."² If pressed Channing contends, Trinitarians admit ".... Christ's human mind alone sustained the pains of Death".³

Christ's supreme glory, to Channing's mind, was his complete accord with his Father's will. On the principle that God's nature was essentially that of universal rectitude, he taught that Christ could communicate no greater good to men than the virtue of rectitude. In a wonderful sense this goodness

¹"Unitarian Christianity", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 376.

²Ibid., p. 375.

³Ibid., p. 375.

was characteristic of Jesus. His marvellous distinction was excellence of character. His obedience to God's will, his attitude of disinterestedness, his purity of life and motives, were the elements of that virtue he taught his disciples and reveals to us. Obedience was Christ's bond of union between himself and his Father. He said, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."¹ Again he said, "...the Father hath not left me alone; because I do always those things which please Him."² Disputing about the rank of Jesus turns men's minds from the important principle of Jesus' life, namely, that perfect accord with the will of his Father which was and is and ever will be, his supreme glory and his deepest joy. Following Christ's example of obedience to the Father's will brings a state of heavenly happiness into our life in this world; brings us into the kingdom and gains us the Father's fellowship. Seeking to follow Christ unfolds in us the great virtue of holiness in life which consists of a right spirit towards God and man.

¹Matthew 7: 21.

²John 8: 29.

The doing of God's will is the beginning and the end of Christianity.

Jesus accomplished this harmony with God, this obedience to His will by means of prayer. Prayer is not asking God to do what we want, but asking God to use us as he wills. This sort of consecration gives us a rich consciousness of fellowship with God. Of all worshippers of the Father, Channing felt, none were more faithful, or came with a deeper sense of need than Jesus. He was meekest of all worshippers of God. Then, too, his attitude was always that of filial devotion to the Father.

"Unitarianism promotes piety, by the high place which it assigns to piety in the character and work of Jesus Christ. What is it which the Unitarian regards as the chief glory of the character of Christ? I answer, his filial devotion, the entireness with which he surrendered himself to the will and benevolent purpose of God. The piety of Jesus, which, on the supposition of his Supreme Divinity, is subordinate and incongruous is, to us, his prominent and crowning attribute. We place his oneness with God, not in an unintelligible unity of essence, but in unity of mind and heart, in the strength of his love, through which he renounced every separate interest and identified himself with his Father's designs. In other words, filial piety, the consecration of his whole being to the benevolent will of his Father, this is the mild glory in which he always offers himself to our minds; and, of consequence, all our sympathies with him, all our love and veneration towards him, are so many forms of delight in a pious character, and our whole knowledge of him incites us to a like surrender of our whole nature and existence to God."¹

¹"Unitarian Christianity Most Favorable to Piety", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 394.

The character and spirit of Jesus are to be considered as more important than his rank. We may rejoice that this principle was revealed in such a marvelous, though mysterious way. The birth of Jesus took place in humble fashion. He was born in a stable and cradled in a manger. His life was developed amid simple things. His ministry and message were not based on pomp or power. He knew labor, hardship and suffering. His outward lot was never easy. Often great strength lies unused or great possibilities are latent because no opportunity arises to develop or bring them out. Channing said this was not true in the case of Jesus. He commanded no host of workers or regiments of armies. What he accomplished, he did by his strength alone and the power of God who sustained him. The kingdom he established was in terms of human life and power of soul. The world could not comprehend that in the mind and soul of this humble man a new order had been born among men. Channing felt that he understood Jesus best when he saw him associating with the ignorant and the lowly, revealing himself to them in his love and sharing with them his lot. This humbleness of all material circumstance in the life of Jesus revealed to Channing the regenerating

power of his being, his mind, and spirit. No one was born of humbler rank than the Lord Jesus. Yet the names of those who were high in power are now forgotten; no one who ever lived in any measure rivals him. The laurels of the world have perished. But Christ's name is freshened eternally by tears of gratitude and love. The humbleness of his life has enshrined Jesus in the hearts of men.

THE DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST

More and more during the years just previous to 1819, Channing was being moved to the leadership of the liberal forces, more or less, against his will. However, once he had put his hand to the plough, Channing was not the sort of person to look back. He possessed the type of mind that did not act upon impulse. From boyhood he had developed the habit of thinking things through before he spoke or acted and then proceeded fearlessly. In 1819, Channing showed how deeply he had thought on both sides of the problem by giving to the world another discourse, entitled "Objections to Unitarian Christianity Considered". Channing wished to be tolerant and fair. Now that he had taken a strong Unitarian stand, he did not wish it thought that he ignored, or had neglected the objections

to the position he took. In his defense, the first point he took up was that of the divinity of Christ.

"It is objected to us, that we deny the divinity of Jesus Christ. Now what does this objection mean? What are we to understand by the Divinity of Christ? In the sense in which many Christians, and perhaps a majority, interpret it, we do not deny it, but believe it as firmly as themselves. We believe firmly in the divinity of Christ's mission and office, that he spoke with divine authority and was a bright image of the divine perfection. We believe that God dwelt in him, manifested himself through him, taught men by him, and communicated to him his spirit without measure. We believe that Jesus Christ was the most glorious display, expression and representative of God to mankind, so that in seeing and knowing him, we see and know the invisible Father; so that when Christ came, God visited the world and dwelt with men more conspicuously than at any former period. In Christ's words we hear God speaking; in his miracles we behold God acting; in his character and life we see an unsullied image of God's purity and love. We believe, then, in the Divinity of Christ as this term is often and properly used. How, then, it may be asked, do we differ from other Christians? We differ in this important respect. Whilst we honor Christ as the Son, representative and image of the Supreme God, we do not believe Him to be the Supreme God himself."¹

The thought of Christ as a being distinct from God and inferior to Him was Channing's view and he based it with all sincerity upon the teachings of the Master.

Again, in his sermon entitled, "Unitarian Christianity Most Favorable to Piety", he said these meaningful words regarding the divinity of

¹"Objections to Unitarian Christianity Considered", Works, 1883 Edit., pp. 401-402.

Christ.

"....to us, Jesus instead of being the second of three obscure, unintelligible persons, is first and pre-eminent in the sphere in which he acts, and is thus the object of a distinct attachment which he shares with no equals or rivals. To us, he is first of the sons of God, the Son by peculiar nearness and likeness to the Father. He is first of all the ministers of God's mercy and beneficence, and through him the largest stream of bounty flows to the creation. He is first in God's favor and love, the most accepted of worshippers, the most prevalent of intercessors.. In this mighty universe, framed to be a mirror of its Author, we turn to Jesus as the brightest image of God and gratefully yield him a place in our souls, second only to the infinite Father, to whom he himself directs our supreme affection."¹

Channing said a great deal about Christianity. He felt very strongly that the Christian religion is what it is because of the dynamic example and spirit of Christ. Christianity without Christ would have had but little effect upon the world. Jesus is the life of this religion which bears his name. He took the vague ideas about God and the abstract principles of life such as goodness, purity, faith, and love, and made them realities of personal living. Jesus taught with authority and not as any other philosopher or teacher. The world has had its idealists, theorists, philosophers, and speculators, but their precepts, though very often inspiring and

¹"Unitarian Christianity Most Favorable to Piety", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 395.

helpful, have not spoken as have those beautiful words, every phrase of which was caught by the broad arms of a cross that turned its poetry into the stark realities of daily prose. His love was perfect love, his vision encompassed the invisible, his word was living truth, and the faith by which he was lifted up to God, brought God to all humanity.

"Other Sages have spoken to me of God. But from whom could I have learned the essence of Divine Perfection, as from him, who was in a peculiar sense the Son, Representative, and Image of God,-who was especially an Incarnation of the unbounded Love of the Father? And from what other teacher could I have learned to approach the Supreme Being with that Filial Spirit, which forms the happiness of my Fellowship with Him? From other Seers I might have heard of Heaven; but when I behold in Jesus the Spirit of Heaven, dwelling actually upon earth, what a new comprehension have I of that better world."¹

Not only did Channing give much thought to the doctrines of Christ's nature and work in his discourses of a polemical vein in which his arguments were more of the nature of polished weapons, but he delivered a number of sermons which were warmly evangelical and speak from Channing's very soul. These sermons bear such titles as "The Character of Christ", "The Imitableness of Christ's Character", and "Love to Christ".² They reveal Channing as preacher of a

¹"Jesus Christ the Brother, Friend and Saviour" from "The Perfect Life", 1873 Edit., p. 228.

²"Works", 1883 Edit., pp. 302-328.

specific type of sonship accorded to Christ because of his moral goodness. Though Channing was the great champion of reason in the approach to faith, he felt that among all the excellencies of Jesus and his sound claims to our affection, he was most distinguished for his benevolence which he was able to maintain unshaken in spite of all the outward forces which contended about him. His kindness to men was in no degree altered by their sin. Channing emphasized that to know Christ was to understand the depth and energy of this benevolent principle in his life. It was this inner strength in the mind of Jesus that lifted him to a moral grandeur above all others. The dignity of the offices, or rank of Christ, was not his chief claim to our veneration. They are not to be exalted above the moral worth of Jesus which is most important. To exalt the supernatural or the superhuman is to obscure the moral dignity of his mind, his purity and the inexhaustibleness of his benevolence. To hold that Christ's offices, inspiration, miracles, are his chief claims to our veneration is to forget that it was the spirit within him that made these possible and they are as nothing compared to the disinterested love and moral worth of his soul. Jesus was the man he was because

of the life that he lived. Inspiration of God was bestowed upon him without measure. This inspiration became effectual to the world in proportion as Christ's own heart and mind responded and was inspired by God. Jesus was not a passive instrumentality of God's influence. His personal virtues gave power to his inspired teachings.

"....there are Christians who maintain that Jesus Christ is to be loved as the Son of God, understanding by this title some mysterious connection and identity with the Father. Far be it from me to deny that the Divine Sonship of Jesus constitutes his true claim on our affection; but I do deny that the mysterious properties of this relation form any part of this claim....the moral excellence of Jesus is the great object and ground of the love which is due to him....To be the Son of God, in the chief and highest sense of that term is to bear the likeness, to possess the spirit, to be partaker of the moral perfections of God. This is the essential idea. To be God's Son is to be united with Him by consent and accordance of mind. Jesus was the only begotten Son, because he was the perfect image and representative of God, especially of divine philanthropy; because he espoused as his own the benevolent purposes of God towards the human race, and yielded himself to their accomplishment with an entire self-sacrifice. To know Jesus as the Son of God is not to understand what theologians have written about his eternal generation, or about a mystical, incomprehensible union between Christ and his Father. It is something far higher and more instructive. It is to see in Christ, if I may say so, the lineaments of the Universal Father. It is to discern in him a godlike purity and goodness. It is to understand his harmony with the Divine Mind, and the entireness and singleness of love with which he devoted himself to the purposes of God and the interests of the human race. Of consequence, to love Jesus as the Son of God is to love the spotless purity and Godlike charity of his soul."¹

¹"Love to Christ", Works, 1883 Edit., pp. 320-321.

The text of the sermon from which the above quotation was taken is "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."¹

THE HUMANITY OF JESUS

Channing taught that Jesus Christ was truly a human being. To him, the supremacy of Christ was greatly due to the fact that he appeared in the form and character of a man. The idea which had become a doctrine of other Christian groups that Christ had been preëxistent, Channing disavowed. He did so on the ground that we should be happier that Christ came to us not as a supernatural representation.

"It is a matter of joy that our Deliverer was clothed with humanity. For this has brought him near us, and established a bond of sympathy which is inestimably precious.....He was flesh of our flesh."²

Jesus grew naturally, sharing all the vicissitudes of our human lot. "He was thus actually one of our race, a brother of the great human family."³

Jesus Christ as a human being is capable of our understanding and imitation and comprehension. Channing preached a great sermon "The Imitableness of Christ's Character". He spoke of the importance of the example of Jesus. We have all felt the

¹ Ephesians 6: 24.

² "Jesus Christ, the Brother, Friend and Saviour", from, "The Perfect Life", 1873 Edit., p. 216.

³ Ibid., p. 217.

influence of example. Evil companions lead us to do deeds of which alone we would never have been guilty. A bad crowd instigated the crucifixion. A good crowd uplifts us; it once made possible a Pentecost. Jesus did not come to pronounce laws from a kingly throne. He came not as a messenger, unconnected with his message, nor was he a mere instrumentality for the communication of a message from God. He came not only to teach a message but to live it. In an important sense Jesus himself was his message to men.

Jesus is not to be admired from afar but to be approached.

"Many feel that a close resemblance of Jesus Christ is not to be expected;....Until men think of the religion and character of Christ as truly applicable to them, as intended to be brought into continual operation, as what they must incorporate with their whole spiritual nature, they will derive little good from Christ. Men think, indeed, to honor Jesus when they place him so high as to discourage all effort to approach him. They really degrade him. They do not understand his character; they throw a glare over it which hides its true features. This vague admiration is the poorest tribute which they can pay him."¹

The very essence of real greatness of character is its communicable attribute. It cannot be monopolized. It permeates others. There is a

¹"The Imitableness of Christ's Character", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 311.

tendency among people who have great ability, or power, to estrange themselves from others, deeming them as inferior. Not so with Jesus. Though he was greatest of all human beings, of such exalted nature as to be more than merely human, he was infinitely near to all. He gave of himself freely. Channing, thinking of the progress that man has made, and of the fact that growth is a principle of all life, thought it not beyond attainment, but certainly a sublime object, namely the proposal to ourselves of Jesus Christ as the standard for our lives. He felt it not beyond our human attainment to become one with Christ as partakers of the celestial mind. Christ is our standard and model. All our efforts should be toward the conforming of our lives to Christ. We should not attempt undue vehemence, or haste, but press on according to the laws of our natures. To over strain the laws of nature is to pay dearly, as Channing himself had learned at the cost of his own health. The attainment of Christlike virtue must be gradual. Continuous patient effort, motivated by serene aspiration and calm deliberation, constitutes the means of spiritual progress. The humanity of Jesus brings him near as a brother and friend of man. The gospels picture Jesus as in the

midst of human beings and human affairs. He was supremely conscious of his great mission, but it drew him near rather than separated him by any sense of superiority.

"He saw in every human being a mind which might wear his own brightest glory. He was severe only towards one class of men, and they were those who looked down on the multitude with contempt. Jesus respected human nature; he felt it to be his own. This was the greatness of Jesus Christ. He felt, as no other felt, a union of mind with the human race, felt that all had a spark of that same intellectual and immortal flame which dwelt in himself." ¹

THE CHARACTER OF JESUS CHRIST

Channing taught that Christ was perfectly good, revealing the character of God by his love of God and his fellow men. He lived a life of good works and holiness; he is our example of Christian virtue. His character was altogether excellent. This was achieved by the inspiration of God and the full conformity of his mind and heart to the will of the Father. Jesus was the glorious revelation, not in an abstract or literal sense, but in terms of living truth which all could understand, of the love of the Father for those who have been created in his image with the glorious destiny of likeness to the Father.

¹Ibid., p. 315.

The character of Jesus meets all tests. He was no impostor. Such a sublime idea as Jesus gave substance and reality to never could have been the idea of a clever mind alone. An impostor would either have overacted the character or underacted it. The life of Jesus was the perfect exemplification of the truth he taught. Both the form and spirit harmonized completely. His character was both the example of Christian virtue and the evidence of the truth, the genuineness, and the reality of Christianity. He came to seek and to save the lost. He was the friend of all; especially the needy, the sinful, the sorrowful. He exemplified the forgiveness and love of God. He is our brother, friend and Saviour. He was always conscious of the multitude, not as a mass, but as individuals, with the possibilities and longings of individuals.

"Thus Jesus lived with men; with the consciousness of unutterable majesty he joined a lowliness, gentleness, humanity, and sympathy, which have no example in human history. I ask you to contemplate this wonderful union. In proportion to the superiority of Jesus to all around him was the intimacy, the brotherly love, with which he bound himself to them. I maintain that this is a character wholly remote from human conception. To imagine it to be the production of imposture or enthusiasm shows a strange unsoundness of mind. I contemplate it with a veneration second only to the profound awe with which I look up to God. It bears no mark of human invention. It was real. It belonged to and it manifested the beloved Son of God."¹

¹"Character of Christ", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 309.

The text of the sermon on "The character of Christ" from which this quotation was taken was, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."¹

Jesus Christ was the image of moral perfection. Channing felt that the great idea of Christ that should shine through all preaching was the thought of his moral perfection. The whole object of preaching was to preach the perfect in God, in Christ, and the perfection to which man is called as a Christian. Jesus is the example of Christian virtue because in the perfection of Jesus we have a model, not for our discouragement, but that by perseverance we may attain. "From Jesus I learn what man is to become, that is, if true to this new light; and true he may be."²

The character of Jesus revealed the character and nature of God. Channing felt that many had been led into error by the false teaching of religion as limiting, or crushing, the fuller life of the soul. He also felt that in certain types of religious thought, God was depicted erroneously and views were proclaimed which depressed and debased the human

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Matthew 17: 5.

²

"Honor Due to All Men", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 70.

mind. But in Jesus, we find no such teaching. In him, God's kindly interest in all his creatures is taught. Jesus, who gave the most considerate attention to the downcast and despised of humanity, showed that in God's loving providence every human soul is of value in God's sight. The ministry of Jesus among the poor and lowly gave this teaching a vivid presentation and revealed God as loving, kind, benign, and gracious to all. It was no longer an abstract principle once Jesus had revealed it.

The "....leading feature of Christianity is the knowledge which it gives of the character of God. Jesus Christ came to reveal the Father.....God is most worthy to be known, because He is the most quickening, purifying, and ennobling object for the mind; and His great purpose in revealing Himself is that He may exalt and perfect human nature. God, as He is manifested by Christ, is another name for intellectual and moral excellence; and in the knowledge of him our intellectual and moral powers find their element, nutriment, strength, expansion, and happiness. To know God is to attain to the sublimest conception in the universe. To love God is to bind ourselves to a being who is fitted, as no other being is, to penetrate and move our whole hearts;....This constitutes the chief glory of religion."¹

Channing taught that man was made for virtuous attachments. The godlike virtues of Jesus are not only the model of human attainment but reveal the nature of God in terms of benevolence, rectitude,

¹"The Great Purpose of Christianity", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 248.

forgiveness, and love. A man, who is touched by the revelation of these virtues in Jesus Christ, not only will receive great aid in his conflict with evil but has found the high road to happiness as a rational and moral being.

THE WORKS AND PURPOSE OF CHRIST

The great theme of Channing's preaching of Jesus Christ was that he came not to be an outward but an inward deliverer; not to build an earthly kingdom but to establish his kingdom within us. Nothing was more important than that Jesus should win recognition on the basis of his merits and virtues. The miracles of Christ's ministry were performed with a simplicity and unostentatiousness which did not so awe the minds of men as to separate Christ from them. Miracles performed in any other manner would have so overwhelmed the mind that his love would have lost its important place in all that he did. The miracles helped to win faith in him and his divine mission and their simple performance never distracted the minds of the spectators from fellowship with him as brother and friend. Channing considered the miracles among the most important and reasonable facts of history. They proved the existence

of a power, or mind, which can, if it wills, suspend or reverse the laws of the material world. This was evidence for Channing, that the mind has the possibility of a perfection which nature cannot gain. Miracle is a pledge of the elevation of the human soul. It witnesses to all sincere believers the power of a "...glorious gospel of the blessed God....."¹

Channing considered the miracles of Jesus in unison with his character as a whole. The important feature of Christ's whole life was its spirituality. The miracles were to be taught as types of spiritual experience. For example,

"When your pupils read of his giving sight to the blind, let them see in this a manifestation of his character as the Light of the world; and, in the joy of the individual whose eyes were opened from perpetual night on the beauty of nature, let them see a figure of the happiness of the true disciple, who, by following Christ, is brought to the vision of a more glorious luminary than the sun, and of a more majestic and enduring universe than material worlds."²

The miracles were not Christ's chief claim. The moral dignity of his mind and his spiritual power, by means of which he performed miracles constitute his chief claim.

¹First Timothy 1: 11.

²"The Sunday-School", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 453.

His works attest his divine mission. Looking back over the Christian centuries we see that a new state of society, and a change of the human mind, have taken place. Jesus and his humble apostles without a human weapon and against the worldly forces of pomp and power have won their way, putting a new spirit into the hearts of men until even his enemies have become his friends. No impostor could have wrought these great changes in the life of the world. The fact that Jesus, and through Him his disciples have done it, attests to his divine mission.

Channing felt that the common mode of stating the doctrine of Christ's mediation degraded God's character. It led men to think that Christ's death changed God's attitude toward man and that this change constituted the efficacy of his sacrifice.

"We earnestly maintain that Jesus, instead of calling forth, in any way or degree, the mercy of the Father, was sent by that mercy to be our Saviour; that he is nothing to the human race but what he is by God's appointment; that he communicates nothing but what God empowers him to bestow; that our Father in heaven is originally, essentially and eternally placable, and disposed to forgive; and that his unborrowed, underived, and unchangeable love is the only fountain of what flows to us through his Son."¹

In a catechism which Channing drew up for the use of his Sunday school pupils, he said that Jesus

¹"Unitarian Christianity", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 379.

endured the agony of the cross and shed his blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Channing held that it is important to understand what is meant by the phrase, redemption by the blood of the cross. He illustrated what he meant by saying that when we speak of a country being saved by the shed blood of its patriots, we do not mean that the nation was saved by the actual pouring out of their blood-stream upon the soil or the pain of their agony. Rather they were saved by the love in their hearts which caused them to offer up their lives in defending the country they loved more than their lives. So it is in the case of Christ. We are not saved by any mysterious element in his giving of himself. We are not redeemed by the material blood which poured from his body and carried away his strength. The importance of his offering up of himself upon the cross is spiritual, not material. His spirit, character, and love are the important things. To be redeemed by his blood is to be redeemed by his goodness. His religion was sealed by his blood and his redeeming spirit shines forth gloriously and eternally from the cross. Thus his sacrifice was not in vain because it is the means to Christian virtue. Christ tasted death upon the

cross that all men might understand his sharing of the human lot to the full. The cross was the severest trial of the great benevolent principle of Jesus' life and witnessed its triumph.

The resurrection, the greatest of the miracles of Jesus showed the power of spirit over nature. Channing taught that the assurance of a future life strengthens virtue. After the resurrection, immortality was no longer a conjecture, but a certainty. The resurrection is the foundation of our hope of immortality. It linked human life with the eternal. Jesus was not only the great revealer, of the way unto life and happiness in this life but for all eternity.

Channing said the supreme purpose of Jesus was the moral and spiritual deliverance of men from sin. He came to save us from sin itself by giving us an example of holy living and the means to attain it. He came as the light, physician and saviour of diseased and darkened minds. His precepts and promises are of worth for us as an effectual motive of purifying the mind and changing it into the likeness of his celestial excellence. This is a work of regeneration and redemption. Jesus was convinced of the infinite worth of the soul. That he came to redeem men from

sin to virtue is a teaching we meet everywhere in the Scriptures. "...thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins."¹

"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness:...."²

Jesus was the great emancipator. He came to set the human spirit free; to excite the unfolding of man's affections and energies not only in the ranges of humanity but also the infinite realms of his divinity.

How little the human mind is free from superstition, prejudice and selfishness! Jesus unfettered the intellect. He summoned the human reason to its great function of free inquiry as to its own nature and the mystery of God. Channing said that Jesus was the emancipator of the conscience that it might command men's minds once more to duty and moral rectitude. He released hope in the heart that it might soar to brighter splendors beyond the grave. He broadened the horizons of love to include all men and lift them up to God. His purpose was to give all men spiritual liberty.

"What liberty does that Spirit gain, which,

¹Matthew 1: 21.

²1 Peter 2: 24.

breaking away from all illusion of inferior good, gives itself freely up in veneration, confidence, and grateful joy to the Infinite Father, in whose Perfect Character, Purposes and Works, it finds an everlasting range for its noblest faculties, an ever-unfolding Object for its loftiest love."¹

Christ was a reformer, Channing taught. He came teaching a truth to improve the world, to unite men by new ties to God, and to one another. He loved man as man for his infinite worth. He came to save humanity by unveiling the image of the divine in the human soul.

Christ was the first philanthropist. He upheld a philanthropy as wise as it was fervent, uniting grandeur and meekness in beautiful proportions. He taught the spirit of love and good will which should end war. His love enthroned in the hearts of men would free all slaves. He came, bringing a new spirit of order and beauty to the troubled state of society.

"So peculiar, so unparalleled was the benevolence of Jesus, that it has impressed itself on all future times. There went forth a virtue, a beneficent influence from his character, which operates even now. Since the death of Christ, a spirit of humanity, unknown before, has silently diffused itself over a considerable portion of the earth. A new standard of virtue has gradually possessed itself of the veneration of men. A new power has been acting on society, which has done more than all other causes combined to disarm the selfish passions, and to bind men strongly to one another and to God. What a monument have we here to the virtue of Jesus! and

¹"Jesus Christ, The Brother, Friend and Saviour", from "The Perfect Life", 1873 Edit., p. 238.

if Christianity has such a Founder, it must have
come from Heaven."¹

¹"Evidences Of Christianity", Works, 1883 Edit.,
p. 219.

CHAPTER VI

CHANNING'S VIEW OF MAN

Channing's teachings grew out of his regard for the worth of man as an individual of infinite potentiality. He was not created merely for a material purpose or temporal existence. He was created, a living and free soul, in the image of God and destined for the fuller life of eternity, Man was created with the power to reason, to analyze and to create. This faculty in man is more real than his material body. To be conscious of possessing an arm or a leg is first to have the thought of these objects. Thought is not a material thing. Therefore man's spiritual nature is his most significant possession and of foremost importance.

"We are not mere creatures of matter and sense. We conceive a higher good than comes from the senses. We possess as a portion of our being, a law higher than appetite, nobler and more enduring than all the laws of matter,-the law of duty. We discern, we approve, the right, the good, the just, the holy, and by this sense of rectitude are laid under obligations which no power of the outward universe can dissolve. We have within us a higher force than all the forces of material nature,-a power of will which can adhere to duty and to God in opposition to all the might of the elements and all the malignity of earth or hell. We have thoughts, ideas, which do not come from matter, the ideas of the Infinite, the Everlasting, the Immutable, the Perfect. Living amidst the frail, the limited, the changing, we rise to the thought of Unbounded,

Eternal, Almighty Goodness."¹

Channing taught that man is the greatest of all created beings. He is more valuable than a city or a state. He is distinguished above the inferior animals by his capacity to progress. He has a rational and moral nature and a sense of duty. Every human being is worthy of honor as such. Even in his imperfection he bears the signature of God. Man was not made to be the slave of creation but its master. To so submerge man in matter as to prevent the growth of his spiritual nature would be to contradict the very plan of creation, for everywhere we see mind shaping and controlling the material world.

Channing held that man because of his spiritual nature is worthy of all respect and love. A great idea which is characteristic of the energy of America is the idea of individual rights. Liberty is the all important thing. This liberty imposes on all, the moral obligation to refrain from doing it violence. Liberty under the law is the great idea of American institutions. It is the political creed of the free and united states. Such conceptions of

¹"Christian Worship", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 416.

human rights are derived from respect for man as an individual.

"....we felt....that, in securing to every man the largest liberty, the right to exercise and improve all his powers, to elevate himself and his condition, and to govern himself, subject only to the limitation which the equal freedom of others imposes, we were providing most effectually for the common good. It was felt that under this moral freedom men's powers would expand, and would secure to them immeasurably greater good than could be conferred by a government intermeddling perpetually with the subject and imposing minute restraints."¹

Channing's view of man was not derived so much from the history of man, or his present state, as from his possibility of attainment. He had little time for views which sought to disparage the noble potentialities of man. Everything we see witnesses to the unseen. It is the task of true wisdom to discern in the present the signs of the unseen. Man has but taken the first step in an endless career. What he has done foretokens what he is yet to feel and think and do.

"This lesson is that man, with all his errors, is a wonderful being, endowed with incomprehensible grandeur, worthy of his own incessant vigilance and care, worthy to be visited with Infinite Love from Heaven. The Infinite is imaged in him more visibly than in the outward Universe.....This truth is the central principle of Christianity. And from failure to recognize this, our existing systems of education, policy, legislation and social intercourse, are poor,

¹"The Duty of the Free States" , Works, 1883 Edit., p. 889.

narrow, and impotent.....Man really is a mysterious being, endowed with divine powers and welcomed by a boundless destiny."¹

Channing conceived of man as a free being. God did not create men to be machines. They have the power of free action; to rise or fall according to the use or abuse of their powers. But knowledge and philosophy have tried to unfold the mystery of his future state and failed. Often they have led man from the truth and been unable to guide him back. Men, as free beings, who bear a moral relation to God, need a special revelation of His paternal interest in every individual. A fixed material order, while it speaks of the glory of the Creator and proclaims Him as universal sovereign does not clearly express His love and interest for every individual. In the vital interests of the individual, God shows His special care for all. He communicates Himself to each one according to his special needs. Thus, God reveals Himself as friend and benefactor of each living soul. This principle of man as a free being had great bearing upon Channing's views of slavery. He taught that all men were free. If one man could be held as property then all could

¹"God Revealed in the Universe and in Humanity", from "The Perfect Life", 1873 Edit., p. 43.

be so chained. A man could not be held as property because he had rights. He was made by God and to God alone did he owe the allegiance of his soul. Slavery deprived a man of the use of his powers for his own well-being. It made him the passive instrument of another's will; the subject of another's irresponsible power.

Channing taught that man was not morally impotent.

"....we do not mean to deny the importance of God's aid or Spirit; but by his Spirit we mean a moral, illuminating, and persuasive influence, not physical, not compulsory, not involving a necessity of virtue. We object, strongly, to the idea of many Christians respecting man's impotence and God's irresistible agency on the heart, believing that **they** subvert our responsibility and the laws of our moral nature, that they make men machines, that they cast on God the blame of all evil deeds, that they discourage good minds, and inflate the fanatical with wild conceits of immediate and sensible inspiration."¹

Channing taught that each man has self-forming powers and the capacity of self-improvement. We have the faculty of discerning not only what we already are but what we are capable of becoming. Every man has within himself the germ of growth and the promise of a perfection to which no bounds have been set. This is the distinction of man over the brute. He has the self-searching and self-forming quality. This self-forming quality not only makes

¹"Unitarian Christianity", 1883 Edit., p. 380.

us capable of limitless growth but is the ground of human responsibility. We choose the objects of our thought. We can determine our course and should arrange all our plans and ambitions with the lofty end of perfection in view. This self-forming power which slumbers in all men is their greatest possession. In it, Channing saw the spark of man's divinity.

Channing contended that man would have been wronged by his Maker if the doctrine of Trinitarianism were true. Nothing should ever be permitted to come between God's communication of Himself to man and man's full and responsive gratitude for the same.

"Now we object to Trinitarianism, that it obscures the mercy of God. It does so in various ways. We have already seen that it gives such views of God's government, that we can hardly conceive of this attribute as entering into His character. Mercy to the sinner is the principle of love, or benevolence in its highest form; and surely this cannot be expected from a being who brings us into existence burdened with hereditary guilt, and who threatens with endless punishment and woe the heirs of so frail and feeble a nature. With such a Creator the idea of mercy cannot coalesce; and I will say more, that under such a government man would need no mercy; for he would owe no allegiance to such a Maker. and could not, of course, contract the guilt of violating it; and, without guilt, no grace or pardon would be wanted. The severity of this system would place him on the ground of an injured being. The wrong would lie on the side of the Creator."¹

¹"Unitarian Christianity Most Favorable to Piety", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 396..

Channing maintained that liberty is each man's right. It is the gift of Jesus Christ. Channing preached a sermon of great insight and analytical power in the year 1830. The subject of the sermon was, "Spiritual Freedom". The text was,

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."¹

Channing speaks of the importance of inner spiritual freedom in religion and government. The essence of spiritual freedom, Channing said, was power, power to master the senses, and to guard the rights of the intellect. The free mind recognizes in all human beings the image of God. It is not the passive instrument of outward circumstances or the whim of society. The free mind, through confidence in God, casts out all fear and resists the bondage of habit. It guards the empire of its own freedom.

"I call that mind free which, conscious of its affinity with God, and confiding in his promises by Jesus Christ, devotes itself faithfully to the unfolding of all its powers, which passes the bounds of time and death, which hopes to advance forever, and which finds inexhaustible power, both for action and suffering, in the prospect of immortality.

Such is the spiritual freedom that Christ came to give. It consists in moral force, in self-control,

¹John VIII: 31,32,36.

in the enlargement of thought and affection, and in the unrestrained action of our best powers. This is the great good of Christianity, nor can we conceive a greater within the gift of God."¹

Channing said that intellectual and moral excellence have their root in our inner spiritual freedom. We depend upon God for our moral attainments, for without His gift and inspiration we would be helpless. But God does not violate the freedom he has given. Human virtue is self-dominion or self-subjection to the principle of duty, the highest law in the soul. The human mind which has been inspired by God with reason and conscience is capable of determining its progress. It has self-determining power. This solemn responsibility is laid upon it. Great powers are perilous without the Christian principle. Our free powers must be sustained and sanctioned by a Christian spirit. We must revere the freedom of others as we do our own.

In the catechism which Channing formulated, he outlined the duty of man towards God, towards others, and towards himself. The sense of duty is the greatest gift of God. The idea of right is the highest revelation of God to the human mind. All other revelations are founded upon it. Once the great law

¹"Spiritual Freedom", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 175.

of duty unfolds in the human breast, a man enters into an indissoluble relationship with God which no power in the universe can abrogate. Thereafter a man stands before an inward tribunal, on the decisions of which rest his happiness. To obey the voice of duty is to be guided to perfection; to be deaf to its dictates is misery indeed. The moral principle in every mind is the germ of its immortality.

Because this is present in every human being we should honor even the lowliest of men. The sense of duty is the one principle in the soul which makes all men essentially equal. It speaks to all in the name of God; breaks down all barriers; makes all men brothers. It places all on a level as to the means of happiness.

"When we look into ourselves, we find something besides capacities and desires of pleasure. Amidst the selfish and animal principles of our nature, there is an awful power, a sense of right, a voice which speaks of duty, an idea grander than the largest personal interest, the idea of excellence, of perfection. Here is the seal of Divinity on us; here the sign of our descent from God. It is in this gift that we see the benevolence of God. It is in writing this inward law on the heart, it is in giving us the conception of moral goodness, and the power to strive after it, the power of self-conflict and self-denial, of surrendering pleasure to duty, and of suffering for the right, the true, and the good; -it is in thus enduing us, and not in giving us capacities of pleasure, that God's goodness shines."¹

¹"Discourse Occasioned by the Death of Dr. Follen", Works, 1883 Edit., pp. 611-612.

Channing felt that the teachings of the Scriptures, of Jesus, and of Christianity, reveal that the moral perfection of man was the great purpose of God.

"I believe that Christianity has ONE GREAT PRINCIPLE, which is central, around which all its truths gather, and which constitutes it the Glorious Gospel of the Blessed God. I believe that no truth is so worthy of acceptance and so quickening as this. In proportion as we penetrate into it, and are penetrated by it, we comprehend our religion, and attain to a living faith. This great Principle can be briefly expressed. It is the doctrine, that 'God purposes, in His unbounded Fatherly Love, to PERFECT THE HUMAN SOUL; to purify it from all sin; to create it after His own image; to fill it with His own spirit; to unfold it forever; to raise it to Life and Immortality in Heaven;--that is, to communicate to it from Himself a Life of Celestial Power, Virtue and Joy'. The elevation of men above the imperfections, temptations, sins, sufferings, of the present state, to diviner being,--this is the great purpose of God, revealed and accomplished by Jesus Christ; this it is that constitutes the Religion of Jesus Christ--Glad Tidings to All People; for it is a Religion suited to fulfill the wants of every human being."¹

The end of man's being, then, is the perfection of his nature, his mind, his character. To attempt to find happiness by any other road is to fail. Channing said that Christianity meliorates human nature by unfolding its highest principles and powers and opening before it a career of endless improvement. It uplifts the mind by instilling and developing in

¹"The Essence of the Christian Religion", from "The Perfect Life", 1873 Edit., p. 243.

it the thought of its potential splendor. It offers for its possession the unfolding knowledge of the perfection of God.

Christianity builds character in the individual, Channing maintained, by unfolding its true relationship to the perfection of God. The same goodness of God is attainable by man. We press on towards perfection in so far as we exert inward energy in obeying the law of God written upon our minds. As we overcome selfishness through self-denial and grow in love through our practice of the love of Christ we become perfect as He is perfect.

In striving towards a Christlike character Channing said, man is a free moral agent. Free moral agency has been bestowed as a gift of God, but the use of that power is a matter of an individual's own choice. No act would be a virtue if it were not performed of a man's free will. It depends upon the individual, therefore, to choose between the good and the evil. Freedom is the spring of virtue. The very idea of moral excellence is that we choose it. We depend upon God, but His aid is not compulsory. He does not violate the freedom which is His richest gift. The decision as to his own character rests with each individual.

"Perhaps it may be objected to the representation of virtue as consisting in self-dominion, that the Scriptures speak of it as consisting in obedience to God. But these are perfectly compatible and harmonious views; for genuine obedience to God is the free choice and adoption of a law, the great principles of which our own minds approve, and our own consciences bind on us; which is not an arbitrary injunction, but an emanation and expression of the divine Mind; and which is intended throughout to give energy, dignity, and enlargement to our best powers. He, and he only, obeys God virtuously and acceptably, who reverences right, not power; who has chosen rectitude as his supreme rule; who sees and reveres in God the fulness and brightness of moral excellence, and who sees in obedience the progress and perfection of his own nature. That subjection to the Deity, which, we fear, is too common, in which the mind surrenders itself to mere power and will, is anything but virtue. We fear that it is disloyalty to that moral principle which is ever to be revered as God's vicegerent in the rational soul."¹

Channing maintained that the purpose of man is affinity, or fellowship, with God. This truth is revealed in the union of the human and divine in the character of Christ. Man was created as a spiritual being possessing the means of fellowship with the Infinite. Jesus teaches men the virtues of the Father and prepares them for a heavenly state. Channing discerned Godlike virtues in the unfolding aspirations of men and evidences of a limitless life. The faculties of the mind and heart are capable of limitless growth and expansion.

¹"Remarks on the Life and Character of Napoleon Bonaparte", *Works*, 1883 Edit., p. 552.

"The body soon reaches its limit. But intellect, affection, moral energy, in proportion to their growth, tend to further enlargement, and every acquisition is an impulse to something higher.....I no longer see aught to prevent our becoming whatever was good and great in Jesus on earth. In truth, I feel my utter inability to conceive what a mind is to attain which is to advance forever. Add but that element, eternity, to man's progress, and the results of his existence surpass not only human but angelic thought. Give me this, and the future glory of the human mind becomes to me as incomprehensible as God himself. To encourage these thoughts and hopes, our Creator has set before us delightful exemplifications, even now, of this principle of growth both in outward nature and in the human mind."¹

Channing believed that man's progress is eternal. He has made great advances and there is no reason why he should stop.

Channing taught that man was created for a permanent existence. Too many people take only superficial views of man as a transitory being. Man is continually seeking, amid the changing aspects of life, the changeless and eternal. He looks not only backward but forward into the future. The full scope of human possibility has not dawned upon our understanding. The whole meaning of life is not comprehended any more fully than a child understands the picture at which it gazes. God created every human soul with a kindred nature to His own.

¹"Imitableness of Christ's Character", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 314.

The next truth, once Channing has given us his views of man's eternal progress and permanent existence, is man's immortality. Immortality, Channing believed, was the glorious discovery of Christianity. Before Christ, it was only the vaguest abstraction. Preaching from the text, "Our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel".¹ Channing said,

".....before Christ, a future life lent little aid to virtue. It was seized upon by the imagination and passions, and so perverted by them as often to minister to vice. In Christianity this doctrine is wholly turned to a moral use; and the future is revealed only to give motives, resolution, force, to self-conflict and to a holy life."²

Channing uses the same method for his views on immortality which he employed in establishing all his doctrines. He said immortality is written both in God's word and in the soul. Though reason is unable to prove immortality, nevertheless, it accords with, and adopts it, as a great principle of our nature. He believed in the immortality of the individual. In this respect there were evidences to warrant the exemption of the mind from the universal law of decay that we see at work in the

¹11 Timothy 1: 10.

²"Immortality", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 354.

animal and vegetable kingdoms. He uses the illustration of a noble mind and a tree. We never feel in the case of a great intellect that after making an important discovery, nor at any time, that it has finished its work; that its capacity is exhausted. On the contrary, we think of such a mind as being enlarged, that it has attained closer affinity with the inexhaustible resources of the infinite mind. But this is not true of a tree. There comes a time when it is incapable of further growth. As the mind is improved, it understands the meaning of immortality. The thirst of the mind for a continuing and enlarging life was almost irresistible proof, Channing felt, that God had destined us for immortality.

Channing was convinced of the verity of heaven, or a future state. That others might be saved from skepticism, he continually sought clearer more definite interpretations of the heavenly state. The fact that it was the abiding place of Jesus was an infinite thought for his meditation.

"They who are born into heaven go not only to Jesus and an innumerable company of pure beings. They go to God. They see Him with a new light in all His works. Still more, they see Him, as the Scriptures teach, face to face, that is, by immediate communion...¹...it is the chief element of the felicity of Heaven."¹

¹"The Future Life", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 366.

This attraction of the society of heaven should, Channing felt, be sufficient to overcome the great forces of evil in this world.

"To each of us, my friends, is this felicity offered, -a good which turns to darkness and worthlessness the splendor and excellence of the most favored lot on earth. I say it is offered. It cannot be forced on us; from its nature, it must be won. Immortal happiness is nothing more than the unfolding of our own minds, the full, bright exercise of our best powers; and these powers are never to be unfolded here or hereafter, but through our own free exertion. To anticipate a higher existence whilst we neglect our own souls, is a delusion on which reason frowns no less than revelation. Dream not of a heaven into which you may enter, live here as you may....to be joined with Christ in heaven we must be joined with him now in spirit, in the conquest of temptation, in charity and well-doing. Immortality should begin here. The seed is now to be sown which is to expand forever."¹

¹"Immortality", Works, 1883 Edit., pp. 358-359.

CHAPTER VII

CHANNING'S VIEW OF CHRISTIAN VIRTUE

Channing taught the doctrine of the perfection of God's character and that the highest object of Christ's mission was the recovery of men to Christian virtue, or true holiness. All human virtue had its foundation in man's moral nature, his conscience, his sense of duty, and the power men possess of ruling their own motives and actions according to the voice of conscience. This self-determinative quality of man constitutes the basis of individual responsibility. Only as a virtue is the result of the exertion of personal energy is it praiseworthy.

"We believe that no dispositions infused into us without our own moral activity are of the nature of virtue, and therefore we reject the doctrine of irresistible divine influence on the human mind, moulding it into goodness as marble is hewn into a statue. Such goodness, if this word may be used, would not be the object of moral approbation, any more than the instinctive affection of inferior animals, or the constitutional amiableness of human beings."¹

Channing believed that the foundation of Christian virtue is in the moral nature of man. It is the expression of his inner spiritual freedom rather than a virtue imposed by God.

¹"Unitarian Christianity", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 380.

"In all these emotions of our nature I see the kind design of God;....The love, the benevolence which I honor as virtue, is not the gift of nature or condition, but the growth and manifestation of the soul's moral power."¹

Channing never feared for the final, ultimate triumph of truth, right, virtue, piety, and the steady melioration of the human lot. Liberty and Christianity must be joined in the enlargement of the mind and in the advancement of human nature. Outward freedom is unavailing when the soul is enslaved. Unless men look to some law and that be the law of duty, of God, of perfection and adopted by their free choice as the supreme monitor of their actions, they will be enslaved by the tyrannous despotism of their lesser selves. Virtue is not emotion or inspired fervor. It springs from our own spiritual, self-denying energy. Virtue is a determined loyalty to the law of duty.

Channing said that Christian virtue consists in strength of moral purpose, in the soul's resolute determination of itself to duty, and has its origin in moral freedom. All of us when we have adhered to duty with only the approbation of our own conscience can testify to the validity of this

¹"Self-Denial", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 344.

principle. Channing did not deny the importance of God's aid, but, he maintained that it was a moral and illuminating influence rather than a compulsory factor in virtue. Also, Channing maintained that virtue was too high a concern to be the product of government, or legislation. He felt it was a thing of the soul, a thing of excellence and purity of life. Though Channing strongly opposed views of human virtue that tended to make man a mere machine, or impotent creature, he did not deny the great need of man for revelation and inspiration. With him, virtue was an inspiration from God, not a creature of the law.

Channing taught that Christian virtue was its own reward. It was not just a means, but the supreme good for those who possessed it. The joys of virtuous character are native peace, unfolding powers of holiness, and harmony with God. This supreme benefit might be called man's only good. One of Channing's often repeated views was that a great mind is formed by a few great ideas. A man with a mind filled with information, lacking lofty thoughts or comprehensive ideas might be inferior in intellect to the laborer who, with little knowledge has glimpsed great truths. Another of Channing's great thoughts

was the idea of virtue as the absolute and ultimate good. It was the unfolding of his truest self. His great teaching was that of moral excellence, combined with an enlightened, disinterested mind, and the love of God creating man in his own likeness. Truth, Channing felt, was mightier than error; virtue than vice and a Godlike man the glory of the Creator.

Christian virtue and religion are inseparable. Multitudes of people, Channing felt, are religious in the sense of hoping for some great reward. They forget the rewards of good life itself. Christian character is the real aim of Christianity. People who lose sight of this have fallen into superstition or formalism as substitutes for inward piety and spiritual worship. For example, men think of salvation as being saved from hell and the tortures of penal fires. This obscures the real meaning of salvation as abundant life for every free soul. Man chiefly needs salvation from the sin of his own mind. Men strive to escape some outward hell when they are really carrying within themselves the hell they dread. Christianity's chief end is to supply dynamic and power for true piety of life. It teaches the possession of that power rather than a passive reliance upon an Almighty Being.

Among the virtues of a life of piety, Channing gives first place to the love of God. The truest love is shown by man's obedience to moral laws. Religious fervor is valuable only when its result is elevated character.

"We believe that this principle is the true end and happiness of our being, that we were made for union with our Creator, that his infinite perfection is the only sufficient object and true resting-place for the insatiable desires and unlimited capacities of the human mind, and that without him our noblest sentiments, admiration, veneration, hope, and love would wither and decay. We believe, too, that the love of God is not only essential to happiness, but to the strength and perfection of all virtues; that conscience, without the sanction of God's authority and retributive justice, would be a weak director; that benevolence, unless nourished by communion with His goodness, and encouraged by His smile, could not thrive amidst the selfishness and thanklessness of the world; and that self-government without a sense of the divine inspection, would hardly extend beyond an outward and partial purity. God, as he is essentially goodness, holiness, justice and virtue, so He is the life, motive, and sustainer of virtue in the human soul."¹

Having stated the prime virtue of the Christian as the love of God, Channing mentions, as an important branch of virtue, love to Christ. Love to Christ is a duty not of natural, but of revealed religion. Principles, like gratitude, or justice are a part of our nature and all men have some degree of conviction as to their duties to God and their

¹"Unitarian Christianity", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 380.

fellowmen. But Christ has not been revealed to all men. However when he becomes known to the mind, love to him stands on the same ground with all other duties. Channing made no exceptions to the principle that the one ground of virtuous affection on earth, or in heaven, was moral goodness. On this principle, Channing based his love of Christ.

"It is his spotless purity, his moral perfection, his unrivalled goodness. It is the spirit of his religion which is the spirit of God, dwelling in him without measure. Of consequence, to love Christ is to love the perfection of virtue, of righteousness, of benevolence; and the great excellence of this love is that, by cherishing it, we imbibe, we strengthen in our own souls, the most illustrious virtue, and through Jesus become like to God."¹

Channing's love for Christ was for his virtue, purity and rectitude. His sermon entitled, "Love To Christ", develops this thought and closes with a most moving profession of his own love for Christ because of his moral excellence. Channing felt that this was the greatest gift of God and the greatest to be derived from his Son. Loving Christ helps us to become like him.

Channing brought his great Baltimore Sermon in which he had for the first time taken an aggressive step in defense of Unitarian principles, and had

¹"Love To Christ", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 318.

done so in most energetic fashion, to a close by emphasizing the benevolent virtues. He mentions the fact that the liberal Christians held them so strongly that they were sometimes accused of exalting them above piety. But Channing, mindful of the bitter evils which theological conflict had awakened in history, wished to guard against his being the instrumentality of another. He felt that in no other way did Christians so depart from the religion they professed as when disputing among themselves. He said,

"We regard the spirit of love, charity, meekness, forgiveness, liberality, and beneficence, as the badge and distinction of Christians, as the brightest image we can bear of God, as the best proof of piety. On this subject I need not and cannot enlarge; but there is one branch of benevolence which I ought not to pass over in silence, because we think that we conceive of it more highly and justly than many of our brethren. I refer to the duty of candor, charitable judgment, especially towards those who differ in religious opinion."¹

¹"Unitarian Christianity", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 382.

CHAPTER VIII

CHANNING'S VIEW OF SIN

Channing took a positive, optimistic view of human life. I say optimistic because nowhere have I found in any of his works views that man was born to a state of sin. Channing's views were formulated in direct contradiction to the doctrine of man's total depravity. This is an outstanding point and basic to all his thinking. For example, let us take Channing's definition of sin.

"By not a few people sin is supposed to be the property of our nature, born with us; and we sometimes hear of the child being sinful before it can have performed any action. From these and other causes the word gives to many confused notions. Sin, in its true sense, is the violation of duty, and cannot, consequently, exist before conscience has begun to act, and before power to obey it is unfolded. To sin is to resist our sense of right,It is voluntary wrong-doing.....Indifference to our Creator is sin. The transgression of any command which this excellent Being and rightful Sovereign has given us, whether by conscience or revelation, is Sin.....It is not some mysterious thing wrought into our souls at birth. It is not a theological subtlety. It is choosing and acting in opposition to our sense of right, to known obligation."¹

Channing condemned sin as an evil. He bases this contention on the teaching of the Scriptures. The Scriptures teach we are not to fear those who kill the body but we are to pluck out the eye or

¹"The Evil of Sin", Works, 1883 Edit., pp. 347-348.

cut off the limb which induces us to sin. Sin as a violated duty or evil of the heart is Channing's view of the scriptural teaching in the matter. Sin, or wrongdoing, is the chief of evils in the sight of God. This is not only the teaching of Scripture but the Creator has written it on the soul of man. Men know instinctively the difference between excellence and base wrong. Our nature teaches us to abhor and shun sin. Again, experience teaches that sin means suffering. It robs us of peace, limits our happiness and tortures the conscience. Revelation, reason, and conscience are clear that disobedience to God's will, which is not repented of and forgiven, brings misery in our future life. Death works no purifying change in our characters nor does it save us from the effects of our sins.

Channing differed with the doctrine of original sin on the ground of its irrationality. In his sermon, entitled, "Unitarian Christianity", he makes this statement of the system he could not accept.

"According to a more modern exposition, it teaches that we came from the hands of our Maker with such a constitution, and are placed under such influences and circumstances, as to render certain and infallible the total depravity of every human being from the first moment of his moral agency; and it also teaches that the offense of the child who brings into life this ceaseless tendency to unmingled crime, exposes him to the sentence of

everlasting damnation....The system also teaches that God selects from this corrupt mass a number to be saved, and plucks them, by a special influence, from the common ruin; that the rest of mankind, though left without that special grace which their conversion requires, are commanded to repent, under penalty of aggravated woe; and that forgiveness is promised them on terms which their very constitution infallibly disposes them to reject, and in rejecting which they awfully enhance the punishments of hell. These proffers of forgiveness and exhortations of amendment, to beings born under a blighting curse, fill our minds with a horror which we want words to express."²

It was basic to Channing's views that nowhere was the sense of right so strongly exemplified as in the character of God. Channing's faith and piety were rooted in the belief in the rectitude of God. Not because the will of God was irresistible, but because it was the perfection of virtue, Channing could lift his worship to the Father.

The doctrines of original sin and total depravity Channing rejected on the ground that they were irreconcilable with God's creative action. God, to Channing, was essentially a Being of supreme virtue and excellence, a God of mercy, justice and paternal love. God desires the salvation of men through the perfect functioning of their highest powers in terms of expanding virtue, happiness and abundant life. Man's life on this earth is the training

¹"Unitarian Christianity", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 377.

ground for the attainment of that Godlike quality of soul whereby we may be united with Himself and prepared for an ever enlarging felicity in heaven. To so constitute human beings that they should be under the curse of sin and be totally unable to do anything of themselves to remove it; to be so created as to be guilty without having committed sin would make out God to be most unjust and out of line with all other evidences of his providence. Channing had no use for the idea that we share a guilt of sin as a sad inheritance because of the first fallen parent. He taught that at the moment of creation each soul was as fresh from the hands of the Creator as if no human parent had preceded it. The whole nature of God's creation is a glorious pageantry of a loving God rather than that of a God of wrath. He has implanted in us passions and desires, but these rightly used minister to the highest ends of our nature. He has surrounded us with rivals to duty, reason, conscience, that by our own unfettered wills we may love Him more freely and lift Him higher in our souls than would have been possible for us otherwise. If we had a world created for our pleasure alone, where we need make no struggle or effort, would we not be

robbed of the attainment of those qualities of resolution, purity and self-surrender by which we clothe ourselves in the truest splendor of our nature?

Channing's refutation of the doctrine of total depravity was based on the moral argument for the goodness of God.

"Other errors we can pass over with comparative indifference. But we ask our opponents to leave to us a God worthy of our love and trust, in whom our moral sentiments may delight, in whom our weaknesses and sorrows may find refuge. We cling to the divine perfections. We meet them everywhere in creation, we read them in the Scriptures, we see a lovely image of them in Jesus Christ; and gratitude, love, and veneration call on us to assert them. Reproached, as we often are, by men, it is our consolation and happiness that one of our chief offenses is the zeal with which we vindicate the dishonored goodness and rectitude of God."¹

This moral argument, Channing felt, refuted the doctrine of man's total depravity because it was inconsistent with the divine perfections.

In concluding this section, let me say that Channing's high regard for the goodness of man and God did not prevent his taking a strong attitude in his teaching that we should not sin. In fact, if Channing could have been said to have hated anything it would have been sin. The whole force of his sincere, pure nature was against it. He felt

¹Ibid., p. 378.

there was nothing so evil, so deformed, so ruinous as sin. It is the source of the greatest pain and poverty. It crucified the Saviour, Jesus Christ, upon a"...gallows in the centre of the universe...."¹

Sin is an evil, the greatest of all evils. Sin condemns the sinner to the eternal darkness of hell.

Channing taught that resistance to sin is the first step towards our knowledge of God.

"My belief is, that one chief means of acquiring a vivid sense of God's Presence is to resist, instantly and resolutely, whatever we feel to be evil in our hearts and lives, and at once to begin in earnest to obey the Divine Will as it speaks in conscience. You say that you desire a new and nearer knowledge of your Creator. Let this thirst for a higher consciousness of the Infinite Being lead you to oppose whatever you feel to be at war with God's Furity, God's Truth, and God's Righteousness. Just in proportion as you gain a victory over the evil of which you have become aware in yourself, will your spiritual eye be purged for a brighter perception of the Holy One. And this in its turn will strengthen you for a yet more strenuous resistance of sin,-- which will prepare you for still more intimate acquaintance with the Divine Nature and Character. This attainment to a knowledge of God and this instant resistance of Sin are most intimately and vitally related.....For God, as the All-Good, can be known only through our own growing goodness."²

The perfect life is the end of Christianity, Channing said. The great purpose of Jesus is to redeem men from sin to virtue. Nothing is plainer

¹"Unitarian Christianity Most Favorable to Piety", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 397.

²"The Father's Love for Persons", from "The Perfect Life", 1873 Edit., p. 95.

than this. "...thou shalt call his name Jesus for
he shall save his people from their sins."¹

¹Matthew 1: 21.

CHAPTER 1X
SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS
OF
CHANNING'S THEOLOGICAL VIEWS

We have considered Channing's early training, his work as a pastor and have stated his theological views at considerable length. We have already noted the religious situation in New England at the close of the 18th century and the circumstances which brought Channing to the front as the recognized leader of the liberal group, namely, the Unitarians. With these data before us, let us in the spirit of impartial criticism, appraise the value of his views. The purpose of this appraisal then, is to consider Channing's views; it is not a summary of Unitarianism. To trace out the Scriptural roots of Unitarianism from the thought of Old Testament patriarch, psalmist and prophet; to find, in the perfect goodness of the man of Galilee, and the willingness of countless others to sacrifice the life of the body for the liberty of the spirit; the dynamic of its life and power through the centuries of Christian history, -this is beyond the scope of an appraisal of Channing. But Channing did have a part in its history for a

decade. The part given Channing was a lowly one in a rather confused drama. He put his soul into the part, and the drama became a vital episode in the religious history of man. Channing's greatest powers lay in his eloquence as a preacher. No Unitarian, or few in the whole history of preaching, exerted greater pulpit power. As has been noted earlier in this paper, his preaching power was partly a native gift, partly the devoted consecration of his strength of heart and mind towards that perfection which he sought as the great end of all human effort. We will not attempt to propose Channing as a great theologian. He was a moral and spiritual force. He felt that Christian truth was infinite; that to try to confine it in creeds was like trying to capture the sun. It could never be reduced to a system; it was something to be felt rather than described. Anyone who would say as he did, "I cannot but look on human creeds with feelings approaching contempt,"¹ should never be estimated as a dogmatist or creedal formulator; his strength must lie in another direction. Channing's strength took him in the ethical and spiritual direction

¹"Extracts from a Letter on Creeds", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 487.

rather than the theological. Here his thinking was fundamental and constructive. Refusing to be limited by any creed or denomination, his thinking was bold and free, his range of interests extraordinary. To the last we find him true to that thirst for truth, that love of humanity, and loyal to his sense of duty which he believed to be the monitor of God.

About the year 1815 theological matters in New England were coming to a crisis. Though many churches and their ministers remained outwardly orthodox, inwardly they were steeped with Arminianism and Socinianism, forms of semi-Unitarianism, and were virtually Unitarian. No definite break could be pointed to when the actual transition took place. The change came about in quiet inner ways as a natural growth. King's Chapel in Boston is an unusually clear example of the change that took place in so many churches during this period. King's Chapel is the original Episcopal Church of Massachusetts. After the revolution it gradually became Unitarian. A chance worshipper at King's Chapel today finds that the Episcopal liturgy has been altered only so far as to remove passages objectionable to Unitarians. In even milder fashion a quiet transformation was taking place in vast numbers of orthodox churches

in the late 17th and 18th centuries. However, all this had not gone on unnoticed. Nearly a century earlier, Edwards had lamented the prevailing Arminianism. Various preachers, notably Hopkins, had preached in Boston defending the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. Thus from the close of the Revolution to 1815, orthodoxy had not been without its defenders, and surely with the forces of English rationalism and French infidelity (the legacy of French aid in the war) within the fold there was ample need of defense.

Let us bear in mind at this time the fact that Unitarianism was not merely a negative point of view about Christ. No one thinker has ever formulated its system, but three factors may be discerned as contributing to the movement. First, its opposition to tritheism. Whether it has been a Paul of Samosata, a John Biddle, or a Channing, this opposition has taken the form of a sincere but confused attempt to preserve the doctrine of one God and to explain the nature of Jesus Christ from an independent study of the Bible. Second, Unitarianism has advocated reverent Biblical criticism. Priestly, Channing, and Martineau always based teaching upon the Scriptures. They advocated the interpretation of the Scriptures

not only according to the light of reason and the conscience, but in the light of the best historical knowledge and critical scholarship. Third, it was opposed to the doctrine of total depravity and the expiatory nature of the atonement. These were rejected on the moral and ethical grounds that God would not violate the principles of right and justice which He had created in man.

We, also, should notice at the outset that Unitarianism has produced two different types, or attitudes of mind. There is the Unitarian who is out for enlightenment, not especially of a religious character, but any teaching which is broadening to his cultural life. Therefore the Sunday service could be given over to the consideration of any ethical or elevating subject, such as poetry or drama. The other type of Unitarian is the evangelical. Such a type of mind would be primarily concerned with the spiritual. He would not divorce the spiritual from the ethical but the spirit would be the dynamic of his interest in his fellowman. This would be the inner spiritual emphasis of his religion and his relationship with God. Channing was a combination of these two types, but in Channing we find the evangelical predominant.

CHANNING'S PART IN THE CONTROVERSY

We can easily understand that the strength of the liberal spirit in New England could not be suppressed by the authority of a weakened orthodoxy, especially when that orthodoxy became most militant in its effort to effect that end. Large numbers of liberal preachers found themselves the object of attack or suspicion and were subjected to much annoyance because they lacked a strong voice in their behalf. Channing had taken no really active part in keeping the spasmodic fires of controversy aflame. With characteristic caution he had remained silent, save for one letter¹ written in 1815 and a correspondence he had had with the Rev. Dr. Worcester the same year relative to that letter.

The cause of liberalism needed a spokesman; one who would speak not only to the intellect but to the heart, a man honored for piety as well as prestige and one who would present its cause not only with sympathy but with courage. Liberalism found such a voice in Channing.

¹"A Letter to the Rev. Samuel C. Thacher, on the Aspersions contained in a late number of the Panoplist, on the Ministers of Boston and Vicinity".

Channing's first public defense of his liberal views, which were shared by a considerable group of ministers and laymen in and about Boston, was given before a large audience which had gathered for the ordination of the Rev. Jared Sparks as pastor of the new Unitarian Church at Baltimore in 1819. It was a doctrinal discourse and might be considered the platform of liberalism. From that time on Channing was the generally accepted leader of the Unitarian denomination. In its quality of simplicity and convincingness this discourse could scarcely be surpassed. Orville Dewey said of it, "....I think I may say, without any extravagant eulogy, that there never came a more polished weapon from the armory of polemics."¹

But our interest is to consider Channing's theological views as we have outlined them, not from just one sermon, comprehensive as that one was, but the distilled thoughts sifted from the collected works of his entire ministry. First, we shall consider Channing's view of the Scriptures.

The text of Channing's Baltimore sermon sums up his view of the Scriptures, "Prove all things;

¹"A Memorial Discourse on the Life and Writings of Rev. William Ellery Channing, D.D. 1843, p. 13.

hold fast that which is good."¹

From Channing's earliest divinity studies, he sought to approach the Scriptures with an honest and impartial mind. Only in such fashion, he believed, could he ascertain the will of God and the uncorrupted doctrines of Christianity. Channing's views found their source in the teachings of the Scriptures. Writing to a friend in the year 1841, he remarked that it had been a long time since he, "....studied controversial theology out of any book but the Bible...."² Channing taught the Scriptures to be the progressive revelation of God to men and to contain full instruction as to the duties and the life of Christian piety. All the doctrines clearly taught by the Scriptures, Channing accepted without question. To understand what Channing meant by "clearly taught" is important. He meant teaching which he could accept as reasonable. He defends the reason as being worthy of confidence in the interpretation of Scripture. Scripture and revelation are addressed to us as rational beings. Thus he elevated reason above revelation and clashed with the fundamental principle of orthodoxy in the study of the Scriptures.

¹1 Thessalonians 5: 21.

²William Henry Channing, "Memoir of William Ellery Channing", Volume 11, p. 457.

Channing and orthodoxy were in accord on most of the important principles of Scriptural interpretation. However, he did not consent to the principle that the interpretation of Scripture belonged purely to revelation. Once Channing based the authority of the Scriptures upon human reason, he not only subordinated revelation but the Scriptures as well. Though Channing sincerely sought to minimize the differences between his views and those of orthodoxy, there could be no healing the difference on the question of revelation. At this point, Channing, perhaps unconsciously, is the beginning of a far-reaching change in Unitarian thinking. Up to this time, Unitarianism had always depended for its authority upon the Scriptures. From Channing on, though Biblical Unitarians were to offer strenuous opposition, reason became the supreme interpreter of revelation, the Scriptures, and the all powerful arbiter of piety.

It is important to remember that the best orthodox minds did not differ with Channing as to the importance of the use of reason in the approach to the Scriptures. The principles of Biblical criticism, he employed are both sound and reverent. The Scriptures must be studied with special care to

understand the writer's point of view, his language and purpose. The intrinsic ambiguity of language, the poetic use of the language of feeling and emotion, and such other difficulties as interpolated or mistranslated texts, make it clear that the literal acceptance of Biblical passages must often lead to a misguided view of the writer's thought. Channing read the Scriptures for moral and spiritual guidance. He interpreted the teachings of the Bible spiritually, not literally. He did not regard the whole Bible as being equal in importance. He gave the place of first importance to the deeds and words of Jesus. Thus, his approach to the Bible is in line with the methods of Biblical exegesis today. In his time, Channing sought to claim these methods of approach as being exclusively Unitarian. He was ably refuted, however, by orthodox scholars, notably, Professor Moses Stuart of Andover. Aside from his Baltimore sermon, Channing wrote very little on the subject of the authority of the Scriptures. However, his one broadside did much to expose the bibliolatry of an orthodoxy, which sought through the establishment of revelation as the only means of learning what the Scriptures teach, to hermetically seal itself not only against the encroachments of reason but all new

methods of Biblical criticism.

One wishes that Channing were as skeptical of the powers of human reason as he was of the authority of revelation in the Scriptures. When one admits that the Bible, or any part of it, was written by an inspired instrumentality, it is difficult to defend the premise that the interpretation of that inspired revelation is entirely the province of human reason. We cannot help but be too conscious of the fallibility and imperfections of our human judgments to make such a finite and fallible instrument the final authority on eternal matters.

A man who has come through Jesus Christ to believe in a loving God usually has been moved by forces of an infinite and spiritual nature. These forces have been sufficient to possess a man's mind and to change his life.

If reason be truly as trustworthy as Channing believed it to be why are some men who possess great intellectual power and knowledge not guided to a profession of faith in God? The fact that men who know all that is humanly known about the mind can still choose atheism leads us to feel that we need a truer light than we possess in our reasoning abilities alone. Faith in God would seem to be far

more than a scientific or arithmetical proposition. The way to God, surely, is not by contradiction or violation of our God given powers. However, these are but finite means and by them alone we should fail. God has made Himself infinitely available to us through the Scriptures and the example of Jesus Christ as the revelation of the way unto truth and life.

A word should be said regarding Channing's use of the Scriptures in preaching. He lived at a time when sermons were crammed with Scriptural quotations. Naturally such sermons were heavy and lacked interest. Channing, though he did not dispense with the use of a text and Scriptural illustrations, preached in a more vital and human fashion. He appealed to the conscience and the heart of his hearers with a directness, simplicity, and sincerity which were a refreshing contrast to the dry and formal method of piling up a weight of Scriptural texts and then adding, "Thus saith the Lord."

Channing taught God to be a unity; another name for human intelligence raised above all error and imperfection and extended to all possible truth. He worshipped God as a supreme and perfect Being and universal Father. We may summarize Channing's

thought of God under four points; first, God's unity; second, His intelligibility; third, His perfection; fourth, His fatherhood. Channing, of course, throughout his ministry preached on the various other attributes of God, His omniscience, mercy, justice, etc., but the four points I have mentioned may be taken as distinctive of Channing's thought of God.

God's unity- The thought of God as being one infinite **P**ersonality is the generally accepted view of Christian thinking. Channing did not diverge from the orthodox in this particular respect. His view is in line with Scripture, reason and revelation. Orville Dewey tells us in his "Memorial Discourse" of a remark of a parishioner after hearing one of Channing's sermons "'Mr. Channing has a great idea of God'".¹ Channing's view of the unity of God becomes involved in difficulties when it is compared to the Trinity. This difficulty we shall consider in its more proper connection with the relation of Christ in the Godhead. A great many of the difficulties in the controversy between Channing and the Trinitarians were verbal ones. Both believed in one God, one

¹Orville Dewey, Op. Cit., p. 14.

infinite and self-existent mind. However there is this thought which must be mentioned at this point. Channing defined the unity of God in this fashion,

"We find no intimation that this language (the Scriptures) was to be taken in an unusual sense or that God's unity was a quite different thing from the oneness of other intelligent beings."¹

This of course is to defend a perfectly good principle on insufficient ground. His rational approach is weak. We know that God's unity was taught by the Scriptures and it was embodied in the teaching of Jesus. Channing would refute the Trinity of the Godhead by asserting the unity. This was the argument offered Channing by Moses Stuart.² Stuart pointed out, as N. W. Taylor of New Haven was also later to do, that to argue that our unity is like God's unity and because our's is a perfect simplicity that of God's is also, is fallacious reasoning. When Channing sought to defend the unity of God against the Trinity after this fashion, he was open to refutation. No doubt, one should not overexaggerate the meaning of an illustration in a sermon; Channing was using it in the interest of simplicity or in a homiletical sense, but as he was

¹"Unitarian Christianity", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 371. (Parentheses my own)

²Professor of Sacred Literature at Andover Seminary from 1810 to 1848.

doing so when expressly preaching a doctrinal sermon, it seems not doing him injustice to give it the interpretation which he no doubt intended it to have. I am not differing with his doctrine here but with the evident method he used to attain it, on the ground that it was no stronger than the argument for the Trinity which he was trying to refute.

God's intelligibility- Channing was the champion of the rational faculties of our nature. To have any sympathetic understanding of Channing's theology, one must take into account the sensibility of his nature and how he regarded many of the teachings of the time with deep abhorrence. In his effort to rid religion of its obscurities and to dispel the mysteries which in the hands of Calvinistic teachers had been used, he believed, to subvert the reason of man and to degrade the idea of God, he reduced religion to its simplest terms. God was not an obscure mystery which could not be understood except by a few great intellects. God was intelligible to all. He could be discerned in the mind of man, in our aspirations to the good and the true, and in the likeness of our nature to His mind. Because of this likeness of our nature to His, all we have to do is to let the germs or seeds of goodness and

perfection unfold in us according to their natural processes of growth. The mind or nature of man is inherently good, not totally depraved. This we shall consider more fully under the subject of Christian virtue. Man has within him proof of the goodness and intelligibility of God. We share a kindred nature with God. Our mind is created for fellowship with Him in terms of the fullest intimacy and friendship. We confess that our sympathies would be more cordial to Channing than to Calvin in this matter. Any effort to make God clearer and more real to our human understanding rather than more mysterious and distant deserves the fullest commendation and gratitude. To feel that we partake of a kindred nature with God, that God is in us and that we may know him as our friend, are principles capable of unfolding great good. But to emphasize the scope and capacity of the human reason so as to make the nature of God a conclusion of human reason, no matter how many evidences can be deduced, is to be taking a view not only vulnerable because of its extremeness but also weak through the human fallibility of the evidence. Channing rejects the Calvinistic doctrines of man with shuddering abhorrence because of their extreme view of man's utter worthlessness. Channing's

view may be objected to as being the opposite extreme. It sacrifices the infinity of God because the finite mind is made the authority as to His nature. This is obviously to humanize our doctrines of God, which carried to its logical conclusion is outright humanism with the mind of man his only arbiter and hope.

Channing did not attempt to deny the finiteness of the human mind or that God was incomprehensible. Channing did point out the distinction between the incomprehensibility of God and the fact of his being intelligible. Though we cannot discern the whole of God the reason is capable of forming clear ideas of Him. I agree with Channing as to the validity of the reason as one of the ways we come to know God. I believe he vastly overrated it, influenced by circumstances peculiar to him which I have already noted, when he enthroned reason as the sole arbiter of the Bible, revelation and our understanding of God. One suspects that much of the inconsistency of Channing is due to homiletical license. He presses his argument to the limit in all his sermons and while actual inconsistency in thought is not to be detected in his sermons as units, quite contradictory sentences are frequent when comparing one sermon with others of his ministry.

Living in the controversial period that he did, however, what minister could have escaped some inconsistency? It is an interesting bit of history that those who were convinced of their orthodox views during this period once they were put into writing and published were found to have departed from the orthodox. For example, John Taylor, who wrote on original sin was answered not only by Edwards, a Calvinist, but also by John Wesley, the Arminian revivalist of England. So faulty are words in expressing our convictions that sometimes, Channing, the Arminian and Unitarian, can scarce be distinguished from an attitude of most evangelical orthodoxy.

God's perfection- Channing 's thought of God was pure, reverent and lofty. God was supreme, perfect in all His ways, communicating Himself to men. God was perfect rectitude, love and holiness. To study Channing is to bow in reverence before the nobility and purity of his faith in God. To Channing, God was the perfect expression of divine benevolence. This was the outstanding doctrine of Hopkins, the thought of the disinterested benevolence of God. It was because of Channing's faith in the perfect goodness and love of the Father that he fought the

doctrines of Calvinism. The effort to free humanity from the terror and darkness of these views sometimes led him to fervid utterances.

"If I, and my beloved friends, and my whole race, have come from the hands of our Creator wholly depraved, irresistibly propense to all evil and averse to all good,--if only a portion are chosen to escape from this miserable state, and if the rest are to be consigned by the Being who gave us our depraved and wretched nature to endless torments in inextinguishable flames,--then I do think that nothing remains but to mourn in anguish of heart; then existence is a curse, and the Creator is---- O my merciful Father! I cannot speak of thee in the language which this system would suggest. No! thou hast been too kind to me to deserve this reproach from my lips. Thou hast created me to be happy; thou callest me to virtue and piety, because in these consists my felicity; and thou wilt demand nothing from me but what thou givest me ability to perform."¹

Channing lifted his adoration to God not because He was omnipotent, but because He was a righteous, equitable and benevolent Creator. Because He communicated Himself to men in these worthy ways, He merited our veneration, respect and love. Here is the religious spirit of humanity speaking in Channing. Channing never wrote a creed, nor confined himself to one. His thought was singular to him, the result of his own thinking. His habits of study as a boy and student at Harvard had

¹William Henry Channing, "Memoir of William Ellery Channing", Volume 1, p. 353.

developed without limitation of creeds. Naturally then in this most personal of all experiences, the individual's relationship to his Maker, we find Channing penetrating to the essence of faith, laying hold of that moral and spiritual truth which is the builder of theological systems, but greater than they; it is the religious spirit itself which speaks in Channing.

It was on the basis of God as a Supreme Being that he rejected the doctrine of the Trinity although the proof he gave was Scriptural. Channing could not ascribe to any other being an equality of worship with the Father. He rejects the theory of total depravity by the moral argument that it is contrary to man's God given conceptions of divine love and rectitude. We leave Channing's teaching concerning God's perfection by pointing out that Channing's noble view of God's rectitude was no barren doctrine in terms of his own personal life nor in the vital spiritual power of his preaching. Channing would answer the much asked question, Is God good? by a fervent and faithful affirmative.

God's fatherhood- There is nothing of a controversial nature to be mentioned under this head. The fatherhood of God was one of the great

positive doctrines of Channing's preaching. It was said of him by one who often heard him preach, "His idea of 'the Father', came nearer to that of the great Teacher than that of any person I ever knew."¹ God is the universal Father, the father of all men and father of each individual. As a Creator, he is not to be regarded as a stranger or distant sovereign, but as a parent. Channing felt that as beings created in the image of God we have power to become like God. This is part of the creative process; a parent desires not only the well-being of a child but its education, etc.. Channing uses this idea of the loving rectitude of God to support his doctrine of Christian virtue. The filial relationship we bear toward the Father, Channing felt was our chief means of assurance of resisting sin and attaining that purity and perfection of character for which we were created. Channing's great work as a preacher, philanthropist and social reformer grew straight out of his religious conceptions of the fatherhood of God and its corollary the brotherhood of men.

When we examine Channing's view of Jesus Christ, we find it clearly illustrated that Channing was in no sense a theologian in the accepted meaning of the word. In fact, the Unitarian or liberal

¹Orville Dewey, *Cp. Cit.*, p. 14.

movement in New England was not primarily theological but humanitarian. Ancient Calvinistic tenets had long lost power and touch with the thought and life of the people. The ministers and churches of New England were liberal before they became Unitarian. Arianism, as adopted by Channing, was not new in New England. Channing proposes nothing novel in his teaching about Christ. In fact the strength of his preaching was far more on the religious and social aspects of the influence of Jesus than upon the theological. Channing taught that Christ was a unity, a being distinct and inferior to God,-that is, God and Christ were two distinct beings. Christ's divinity consisted in its moral perfection which he achieved through the full consent and accordance of his life with the will of God. Christ was truly a man. He is our brother, friend, and saves us by his example, leadership, and revelation of God's benevolence. His life and works attest his divine mission. Because God was in Christ, he was divine; God is in man therefore he, too, has potential divinity. Channing advocated sincere religious aspirations regardless of creed. . In the bitter Unitarian controversy, Channing was always calm, never letting a religious difference become

a personal one. Here are his own words which he truly observed.

"Do not think me uncharitable, because I speak so freely of the doctrines of Calvinism. I truly love and honor many by whom these doctrines are embraced. I cannot easily be a bigot, whilst memory retains what I have recorded on one of her fairest tablets, and what I delight to recollect, that Popery boasts of a Fenelon, Massillon, Pascal; Calvinism of the New England Pilgrims, of Cowper; Arminianism, of Barrow, Tillotson, Butler; and Unitarianism, of Newton, Watts, Locke, S. Clarke, Price, Lardner. So much for theology."¹

Channing found the vital meaning of Jesus not in the miraculous but in the actual. He stressed the lovely, the good, the pure qualities of Jesus. These constituted his divinity, supported, of course, by prophecy and miracle. This was a distinct change in the general attitude of Unitarians towards Scripture. Scripture had always been the ultimate test of divine revelation with Priestley and his kinsmen. But this shifting of emphasis from the supernatural to the rational, from the Scriptural to the actual, while not a disregard of Scriptural authority was certainly the setting up of a higher tribunal than the authority of the Scriptures. Rationalism and pragmatism are scarcely the principles which actuated the perfect obedience of Jesus to his

¹William Henry Channing, Op. Cit., pp. 352-353.

divine mission. Channing by the important place he gave to the conscience and man's inner sense of right and duty was proposing a different light for the conduct of life than that of the Bible. In a deeply spiritual nature such as Channing's, personal experience and Scriptural authority were a happy harmony, but should the elements of piety and humility, so much a part of Channing be lacking, disregard for the authority of the Scriptures and the very virtues which Channing championed, was just around the corner.

Though Channing advocated reverent Biblical criticism in the light of scholarship and reason, to say that the miracles, or the virgin birth, or any other great teaching of the Bible is true or not true, only as we feel them to be, is setting up a confusing and temporal authority; it is the road to doubt and then rejection not only of the Scriptures but the authority of Christ. To ask how far reason is to be used in revelation, is basic and sincere? But to say that revelation is to be judged at the bar of reason is to leave us only the unenlightened philosophy of pre-christian times. One point more regarding the doctrine that Christ was truly man, a man of the Jewish nation, highly

honored and distinguished by God. Channing would say that Jesus was more than man, but he would deny his being part of the Godhead. Is not this getting close to the answer why Unitarianism has failed to achieve any great hold upon the lives of the people? When people desire a human hero, they are much more interested in living ones. Preach Jesus only as a human hero who lived two thousand years ago and they will not gather with enthusiasm, and numbers to worship him. But, preach the good news that a Saviour has come, who is truly God, that this Saviour is truly risen from the dead and has revealed the way of truth and life, and people will come to worship and to hear about it. This it seems to me is the weakness of Unitarianism which leads to its ultimate paralysis and failure.

Channing's view of the unity of Christ, a being distinct from and inferior to God, served to bring before New England theology the necessity of a statement which would justify the doctrine of Christ's relation to the Father by stating it in intelligible terms. In this respect the Baltimore sermon was a bugle call to orthodoxy to justify its view of the Trinity with its implications of tritheism and the dual personality of Jesus, or to surrender it. Channing's

energetic attack was based on the ground that the orthodox doctrine was unintelligible and unscriptural. Reason flatly contradicted it. This, in the main, was the contention of Thomas Emlyn who had written a book entitled, "A Humble Inquiry into the Scripture Account of Jesus Christ." Emlyn died in 1741, but his views had been reprinted and circulated about Boston as early as 1756. His sentiments were the leaven of Unitarianism and acted with considerable effect upon the New England clergy. His views had aroused the fears of Edwards, though he had not openly answered them.

Channing's service to the cause of liberalism was a reasonable statement of its views and a challenge to orthodoxy to make an intelligible statement of its doctrines. Channing, not being a theologian did not formulate a system or dogma. How high in the scale of created beings Christ is, he did not say. Channing was the voice of his day giving theological dogma another chance to rid itself of its objectionable features or be ultimately ignored. It was inevitable that the spirit of free inquiry which had nurtured the Puritan mind and had been the essence of its speculative thought from Edwards down, should seek the vindication of itself.

On the foundation of Channing's belief in the perfect goodness of God we find him constructing his doctrine of the eternal worth of man. To him virtue and religion were inseparably allied. A life of goodness and holiness was the supreme aim of our attainment. Man was fully endowed with the powers to attain holiness of life. He was not totally depraved. Virtue was the chief potentiality of man. It was rooted in his moral nature. It consisted in man's obedience to the moral laws as dictated by conscience and his sense of duty. It meant loyalty to duty and all the other benevolent virtues of the Christian life, such as love, meekness, forgiveness, liberality and beneficence. This is an important contribution of Channing when the dark view of human nature prevailing in his time is considered. True virtue consists in the practice of the good life. Goodness is not something imposed by God. Channing was in substance denying the doctrine of necessity. Though the aid of the spirit is not denied, character is the result of the perfect functioning of man's moral nature and the forming of his temper and life in obedience to his conscience and his sense of duty. Channing differed with many Unitarians in this respect, especially with Priestley's

necessarian philosophy and Martineau's belief in the divine constraint of duty. But with them he held that all piety and doctrine must prove themselves before the high tribunal of reason and Christian experience. All piety which could not stand these tests, was of little value. Channing was the spokesman of the liberals when he rejected the doctrine of irresistible divine influence upon the mind and life of men. He was the champion of free and independent inquiry. Men were not morally impotent or mere machines. Perfection is never something counterfeited, nor is it a disordered state of mind; it is being true to ourselves and coincides perfectly with the justice, purity, rectitude and goodness of God. Channing attacked all attitudes which sought to lessen human freedom or doctrines which darkened the character of man and God. Channing's view of the worth of man assumes too much of the conscience, when it is unenlightened, as a trustworthy guide to virtue. I believe that conscience is the result of conditioning, and that it is closely related to the training of the mind as to what is right and wrong according to prevailing standards. In the South, during Channing's life, many slaveholders had no qualms of conscience about keeping slaves. Their background and training

had established slavery as right in their own thinking.

Channing's fundamental difference with the doctrine of the Trinity was on moral grounds. He believed that the whole aim of creation was the possibility of man's attainment of that moral perfection which is so uniquely the character of God. Channing maintained the moral perfection of God. Thus a God whose nature was perfect love could not have created a race and endowed it with power of intellect and souls destined for eternity and have been so unjust as to have condemned a portion of it to blameless punishment. God's moral perfection, or the Hopkinsian doctrine of perfect benevolence, was the basis for the belief that God's government was founded on principles of justice and equity. Here Channing definitely breaks with the tenets of Calvin. The doctrines of election and total depravity were rejected as inconsistent with the character of God and the rational nature of man. For the same reason, he found it impossible to accept the Calvinistic doctrine of the infinite atonement to satisfy divine justice. Channing pointed out that upon the cross only the human Jesus suffered and he was but the finite, much less important part of the infinite Christ.

The purpose of Jesus was to bring a moral and spiritual deliverance. Channing stressed the importance of the ministry of Jesus, in the achievement of this, not denying the influence of his death upon the life of man, but saying that Unitarians did not agree as to the force of it. But his death could not have influenced God's attitude towards men, since God was always of infinite goodness and mercy, nor could it be considered as a substitute, or equivalent, for satisfaction of the divine wrath in man's stead. These doctrines, Channing thought to be unscriptural and contrary to reason and our truest sentiments as to God's character of infinite perfection, justice, and love. Channing's argument against Calvinism was based upon the moral argument. He said, "It is plain that a doctrine which contradicts our best ideas of goodness and justice cannot come from the just and good God, or be a true representation of His Character."¹

Channing maintained that Christ was divine only so far as man is capable of divinity. When he separates the finite Christ from the divine Christ upon the cross, he weakens much of his argument of the example of Christ's sacrifice as man's way to ultimate holiness.

How prevalent liberalism had taken hold of the minds of thinking people during this period may be

¹"The Moral Argument Against Calvinism", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 461.

gathered from this excerpt from a letter written in 1821.

"No one sees with greater pleasure than myself the progress of reason as it advances toward rational Christianity. When we shall have done away the incomprehensible jargon of the Trinitarian arithmetic, that 3 are 1, and 1 is 3; then we shall have knocked down the artificial scaffolding, reared to mask from view the simple structure of Jesus."¹

It will be readily felt from a study of Channing's view of the moral worth of human nature that Channing placed an enormous value on the intrinsic worth of man. On this principle he denied original sin as contrary to man's moral nature and irreconcilable with God's creative action. To Channing the lowliest man was immortal and the laws of his reason and conscience were more to be relied upon as the manifestation of God's will than any book or creed. This, of course, is to set up an autonomous reason as the supreme arbiter of what is good and true.

Channing goes a long way in denying constitutional sin though he does not deal with it as such. He says our nature teaches us to abhor sin. This cannot be borne out by the facts of human experience which indicate man's propensity to sin. Channing held that sin is voluntary. It is a conscious

¹Excerpt taken from the original letter from Thomas Jefferson to Timothy Pickering, Esq., February 27, 1821. (Now in the keeping of the Library of the Boston Historical Society.)

digression from the path of virtue. Once again he is placing the emphasis upon our ability to know right from wrong. His conclusions do not solve the problem of sin for those uninitiated in the teachings of Christ. He states that sin exists for the strengthening of character by man's rejection of it. Sin as such becomes a rung in the ladder of human perfection. His view here is far better than that of the utter helplessness of man in the face of sin.

CHAPTER X

CHANNING'S VIEWS ON WAR AND PEACE

At the time in the history of the world when Dr. Channing began his able ministry, there had been but few exponents of the cause of peace. This indifference was prevalent even in the Christian ministry. However the sentiment of the New England clergy against war appears stronger than in other sections of what was then the Union. No doubt Channing was influenced by the genesis of a peace movement, namely the Massachusetts Peace Society, organized in 1815, by Dr. Noah Worcester, a Boston clergyman.

Although Dr. Channing was not an extreme expounder of the peace cause, I feel justified in calling him fearless in the presentation of his views. His fearlessness would be avowed had he lived and preached in 1912 instead of 1812 when he delivered his sermon on the "Duties of Citizens in Times of Trial or Danger." Were Channing alive today he would be ranked as more than a middleground pacifist. But when we consider that Channing stood almost alone in presenting the challenge of peace, when we realize the lack of peace sentiment in the early 19th. century compared with the sympathy of the general public today, we marvel at his strength,

courage and intensity of thought.

Radio programs for peace, munition investigations, anti-militaristic propaganda, ministerial polls and legislative petitions by organized peace groups, purging nationalism from historical textbooks and the pledging of youth for peace, are numbered among present day influences for peace.

Surely Channing's sermons as to the crimes of war and the necessity of peace would find a larger fellowship today from both pulpit and populace. Every generation produces at least a few men whose thoughts transcend their time and though they receive but scant hearing at the time, their work is the foundation of the future. We find Channing's attitude not only to have stood the test of more than a century but also not to have been uncourageous at the crucial moment. I refer, particularly, to Dr. Channing's noble expression in a sermon preached shortly after the declaration of war against Great Britian in 1812. He says, in effect, that all wars are degrading and in every circumstance to be deprecated. The present war, he felt, to be wrong on all counts, and to be abhorred. This stalwart view grew throughout the years. When his words ran counter to the expressed thoughts of the Executive of the United States and

many eloquent congressmen, who were advocating war with France, Dr. Channing appeared before the people with a burning sermon on the text, "Whence come wars and fightings among you?"¹ Again in 1838 when another war with England seemed to be inevitable, Dr. Channing prepared and delivered a lecture on 'War', prefacing his remarks with a pungent appeal that the masses of the community might be enlightened on the crimes and miseries of war. He proclaimed that those inclined towards this war showed, ".... strange blindness to our national and individual well-being."² In these trying times, Channing did not limit his influence to public address, but in more personal ways encouraged the cause of peace. In a letter to Francis Wayland, D.D., we find reference again to the proposed conflict with France in 1835. "At the present moment we are threatened with war for a punctilio, a matter of etiquette."³ He also derides the press for their lack of interest in the cause of peace, "All the crimes and miseries of war are to be encountered for nothing, and yet the public press utters not a word on our obligations as a Christian Community."⁴ In his sermon after the declaration of

¹(James V:1) "War", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 654.

²"Lecture on War", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 664.

³William Henry Channing, "Memoir of William Ellery Channing", Volume III p. 22.

⁴Ibid., p. 22.

war against Great Britian, Channing did not weaken his stand. He condemns attempts to terrify and silence opposition as ignoring the rights of the people. "The cry has been that war is declared, and all opposition should therefore be hushed....Our peace and all our interests require that a different sentiment should prevail."¹

How similar has been the attitude of the newspapers in time of war since Channing's time! I feel that Channing did not stress the influence of the press as strongly and rigorously as do our modern preachers in their peace sermons.

In Channing's sermons on war he used the method of meticulous analysis, which is typical of all Channing's thought. He was not satisfied to present one aspect of the horrors and abuses of war, or to merely suggest them, leaving the rest to the imagination of his hearers. He portrayed them, as an artist developing a picture, allowing no detail to escape his attention. In 1816, before an assembly of ministers in Massachusetts, he frankly defined war in the light of Christianity, calling it the worst vestige of barbarism and the grossest outrage of Christian principles.

¹"Duties of the Citizen in Times of Trial or Danger", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 682.

He expressed the hope that the day would come when the pacifists in times of conflict and bloodshed would be heralded with admiration. He proclaimed that the miseries and crimes of war are not exaggerated horrors. "No depth of coloring can approach reality. It is lamentable that we need a delineation of the calamities of war to rouse us to exertion."¹ He deplores the sluggishness of people's sensibilities, and their indifference to the suffering and death of thousands. But as the artist, he does not leave the picture incomplete. Every vestige of coloring must be added, that the portrait may be impressed in the envisioning portion of the hearer's mind. He takes them back to the scene of recent battle, describing mangled bodies and living ghosts who walk forth with their human countenances disfigured for life and their personalities shattered. Tarrying but briefly at the battlefield, Channing speaks of the victorious, pointing out that the horrors do not stop on the battlefield, but that flocks are scattered, harvests trampled upon and homes of innocent people ravaged and ruined. He elucidates further on the influence of war on the characters of those who make it their

¹"War", 1816, Works, 1883 Edit., p. 643.

trade, on the pressure of war on the community, on its transformation of the morals of society, and its threatening effect on political conditions. In this discourse, he argues that military men become servile to rulers who execute the bloodiest mandates with no thought of the justice of the cause, that soldiers esteem an unthinking courage a substitute for every virtue and by this training become unfit for peace time endeavors. To Channing's mind, the soldier is often unready to meet his Maker at the Judgment seat.

Channing's next consideration is the effect of war on the community at large. He speaks of this as perhaps being less striking than the effect of war on the military man, but still most deleterious. He points out that public burdens are increased while the means of sustaining even normal expenses are greatly decreased. Also, at such times, corrupt men are able to gain exalted offices and extreme power, because the attention of those concerned with the public welfare is otherwise occupied, able-bodied men are drafted from their labors and forced to fight battles which in many cases hold no interest for them, and normal industry is suspended. Channing is pointing an accusing finger in all this. He is laying bare

one of the great injustices of war. People are stripped and reduced while the authors of war profit by the spoils and woes of their country.

According to Dr. Channing all these conditions tend to have a pernicious effect on the morals of society. Honest people are transformed into criminals. "The milder virtues of Christianity are eclipsed by the baleful lustre thrown round a ferocious courage."¹

With comprehensive insight, Dr. Channing refers to the impossibility of the belief that war may be ended by a war. Thus, he anticipated by a century, the futility of the 'slogan' which precipitated America into the conflagration of 1914. He declares that war can never achieve the end of war. On the contrary, he declares, that war feeds on war, and peace becomes a mere breathing time in which belligerents may resharpen their swords. Then, too, he claims that when a nation has increased its military establishments and the spirit of battle has been kindled, war is the only outlet, else sedition would flame within its own borders. In Channing's lecture of 1835, he brings out another reason why war cannot end war. He says that it seldom succeeds in accomplishing

¹"War", 1816, Works, 1883 Edit., p. 645.

what it sets out to do. He reasons that war cannot bring the end of war, because it hasn't in the past. "Accordingly war has been the mournful legacy of every generation to that which succeeds it."¹

Continuing in the same sermon, he turns his attention from the crimes and miseries of war to inquire into its sources. He says that the hatred and malignity of human nature are important sources, but feels strongly that these forces of evil would be impotent were they not greatly aided and encouraged by the glamour and false splendor attributed to this barbarous custom. He holds that the propensity of human nature for excitement lends impetus to war enthusiasm.

"War is of all games the deepest, awakening most powerfully the soul and, of course, presenting powerful attraction to those restless and adventurous minds which pant for scenes of greater experiment and exposure than peace affords."²

Certainly he was foresighted when he suggested taking the glory from battle. It has taken over a century for his suggestions to take root and even today they are only finding fertile soil in the minds of a few leaders and young people who, unswayed by

¹Ibid., p. 646.

²Ibid., p. 647.

past prejudice, are seeking to bring about a better world by the sincere application of their lives to the best that they know.

"....War will never cease while the field of battle is the field of glory, and the most luxuriant laurels grow from a root nourished with blood."¹

False patriotism, Channing recognizes as another very important contributing force. He says that love of country is most natural and justifiable, but the attitude of the Romans towards Rome, in which no other country had value but to grace theirs, is a defamation of the word. He declares that the tie of country should not be greater than love of mankind as a whole.

Another leading force, Channing suggests, is the glamorous impression we receive of war from our youth.. He says that history, fiction, poetry and song, do much to cultivate war mindedness in youth, over and against any possible ideas that this evil might be eliminated. "We become reconciled to it as a fixed law of our nature...."²

As Dr. Channing continues, he brings out what must be a very vital part of any sermon for peace and that is, a suggestion of remedies to offset the

¹Ibid., p. 647.

²Ibid., p. 648.

possibility of war. He does not go all the way with those who propose nonresistance and this disparity I will mention later. However, considering the times and the general temperament of the people, Channing took a courageous position in his program of remedies for war. He asks his hearers to assail the principles and passions that give war birth, to teach that vast territorial gains do not measure the greatness of a state, government, or ruler, but rather the prosperity and character of its people, and to teach that the number of free institutions are more blessed than the number of conquests. And he continues, "Another most important method of promoting the cause of peace is to turn men's admiration from military courage to qualities of real nobleness and dignity."¹ In this same vein he urges that great benefactors who have been accorded scant attention by historians, be lifted from oblivion and accorded their rightful honor. It was indeed fitting that in this 1816 sermon which was addressed to ministers, Channing should urge the importance of their part in eliminating war. He told them to stress clearly the pacific and benevolent spirit of Christianity, referring particularly to the

¹Ibid., p. 650.

teaching that God is love "....and that love is the brightest communication of divinity to the human soul."¹ He says that charity is greater than faith or hope and that preaching is evangelical in so far as it includes disinterested and unbounded charity.

This thought was for the guidance of the ministers in particular, but he also urges that their churches have a part in promoting peace. This he, points out, has not been so in history.

"Shame ought to cover the face of the believer, when he remembers that under no religion have intolerance and persecution raged more fiercely than under the gospel of the meek and forbearing Savior."²

And, speaking of the internal organization of the church, Channing points an accusing finger when he declares that it has not been a good example to nations and urges that it turn the zeal expended upon controversy to coöperation for pacifism. Then, he believed, peace would have a strong chance. When Channing suggested coöperation as a vital means for peace, he did not dream it would become the title of a great movement advancing economic prosperity and ultimate peace. But this great Christian minister saw in that word a possibility that is rapidly being

¹Ibid., p. 651.

²Ibid., p. 651.

made a reality by that remarkable Japanese Christian leader, Toyohiko Kagawa. "Once let Christians of every nation be brought to espouse the cause of peace with one heart and one voice, and their labor will not be in vain in the Lord."¹ And so Channing has suggested a number of very important remedies for war. However, were I to be critical of Channing's remedies in this sermon, I would say that the nature of his cures is largely those affecting the attitude and mind, which when stirred by war's usual effective means of prejudice and propaganda, might easily be nullified.

In the concluding paragraph of this sermon of 1816, Channing refutes one of the common fallacies of militarism. The argument is proposed that war induces courage and heroic bravery in man. However, Channing refutes this by the argument that men have finer qualities brought out by noble principles and ideals than by a false cause.

Those who tend to exonerate war, call it a way of settling disputes, but Channing declares that Christians should use an impartial umpire on such occasions. He labeled a monstrous and savage

¹Ibid., p. 651.

argument, the idea that war clears away the useless and excess population and suggests that moral education and physical improvements are better solutions for the poor and ignorant. Wars are also defended on the ground that the military spirit favors liberty, but Channing asks, why after so many ages of fighting, nations are still so numerously enslaved. "The truth is that liberty has no foundation but in private and public virtue; and virtue, as we have seen, is not the common growth of war."¹ In closing his notes, Channing elaborates on the concluding point in his sermon, very strikingly and with apt illustrations, bringing to his reader's attention, the thoroughness of his thought. I selected this sermon of Channing's to outline because it presented his views in candid fashion. It was preached before his contemporary ministers and no doubt his views on the subject were repeated from many pulpits subsequently. Then, too, it was this discourse which gave impetus to the founding of the Massachusetts Peace Society, the first meeting of which was held in Channing's parsonage. Certainly the publication of such a thorough discussion of the subject must necessarily have brought the

¹Ibid., p. 653.

cause of peace to the forefront.

On the eighth day of June, 1814, several citizens of the vicinity of Boston, gathered at the home of the Honorable William Phillips, to discuss the subject of military despotism which had been for ages, desolating the Christian world. This was shortly after Napoleon had been overthrown and these notable citizens including George Cabot, John Warren, John Lowell, Samuel Putman, Dr. Channing, and others, decided that a day of commemoration should be held to thank God for his goodness in crushing the unruly ambition of so dangerous a despot. Channing was chosen to deliver the sermon on June 15th. In his "Memoirs" we find this mention of it,

"He gave full vent to his feelings, -with free and bold strokes painted the past degradation of Europe, -poured out the vial of indignant ~~censure~~ upon the ambitious despot who had made Christendom his prey...."¹

Denunciatory as Channing may have been in this almost extemporary address, he surpasses himself in condemning Napoleon for his ruthless trampling upon the rights of humanity in his famous essay on the "Life and Character of Napoleon Bonaparte".² It is Napoleon's despotism that Channing takes particular

¹William Henry Channing, "Memoir of William Ellery Channing", Volume 11, p. 100.

²Found in, "Works", 1883 Edit., pp. 522-559.

exception to, feeling however that it was the direct result of so much power placed in his hands by military leadership.

"Of all crimes against society, usurpation is the blackest. He who lifts a parricidal hand against his country's rights and freedom; who plants his foot on the necks of thirty millions of his fellow-creatures; who concentrates in his single hand the powers of a mighty empire; and who wields its powers, squanders its treasures, and pours forth its blood like water, to make other nations slaves and the world his prey, -this man, as he unites all crimes in his sanguinary career, so he should be set apart by the human race for their unmingled and unmeasured abhorrence, and should bear on his guilty head a mark as opprobrious as that which the first murderer wore."¹

This Christian minister continues to say that greater guilt falls on one who usurps despotic power than on one who has been raised to expect nothing else, but declares that all forms of despotism are to be abhorred. He accuses Napoleon of having awed with terror of the sword those who would have restrained him in the interests of government.

Channing has this to say of Napoleon's relation to the church.

"It was a striking proof of the self-exaggerating vanity of Bonaparte, and his ignorance of the higher principles of human nature, that he not only hoped to revive and turn to his account the old religion, but imagined that he could, if necessary, have created a new one."²

¹Essay, "Remarks on The Life and Character of Napoleon Bonaparte", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 526.

²Ibid., p. 529.

Channing's vehement denunciation of Napoleon was not so heartily endorsed by all. Some critics strongly suggested that he limit his admonitions to the pulpit. The Edinburgh Review was not very cordial to his essays. It remarked that Channing's essays on Milton and Bonaparte were both done upon the principle of making out a case for or against. It claimed that his work on Milton was exclusively eulogy and on Napoleon, merely commonplace invective. The Review goes on to say that Channing takes the privilege of triteness out of the pulpit and transfers it to his writings. It also claims that Channing's criticisms were based upon false history and philosophy. "Dr. Channing allows Bonaparte, supremacy in war; but disputes it in policy."¹ And the review goes on to say that had Napoleon done nothing, then he would have come up to Channing's idea of a hero. While I am in sympathy with the part of this criticism which accuses Channing of partiality in finding no redeeming quality in Bonaparte's life, I cannot admit the last criticism as true or even proposed in all seriousness. Certainly if the man in question had done nothing, he would have received no recognition

¹Edinburgh Review, October 1829, Article VII, p. 143.

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¹Edinburgh Review, October 1829, Article VII, p. 143.

from the world, however had his feats been along a different line entirely, and devoid of military despotism, so abhorrent to Channing, his views no doubt would have been approving.

In reference to professional soldiery, Channing goes on at length in his lecture of 1835 on war, citing many critical points against military life. He approaches his position by asking to whom honor belongs in war? This he answers by saying that obviously no honor may be attributed to those remaining at home. Then, he asks, how we may honor those who engage in war, destroying, tearing down and mangling life, and at the same time pay honor to those who prolong life and ease pain. Certainly Channing indicates, there can be no honorableness in the motive behind military life, because, theirs is a vulgar patriotism nourished by war. Channing argues that military life should not be exalted, because the men in it become willing to destroy or slaughter for money or distinction. He feels, however, that society should bear a great part of blame. "I know that society views this subject differently, and more guilt should be attached to society than to the soldier;...."¹

¹"War", 1835, Works, 1883 Edit., p. 657.

Channing continues in this lecture, by asking why great courage has been attributed to the military profession? In studying the question, he finds that this false estimate is a heritage of ancient times. "Our northern ancestors, who overwhelmed the Roman empire, were fanatical to the last degree in respect to military courage. They made it the first of virtues."¹ This issued in a glorious view of death on the battle field and the general notion that normal death was calamitous. From this, Channing points out, a queer chivalry grew up in which dangers were thirsted for. He did not attempt to disparage courage, but says it was not a virtue in itself, but an important aid to virtue. He declares, military courage finds its chief motives in the opinions of the world and its chief reward in vulgar praise. Most soldiers possess a kind of courage that makes them superior to bodily pain, but trembles before scorn. Many also appear courageous to avoid being labeled cowards. Channing urges the need of moral judgment to replace the old barbarous worship of mere courage. "Men who give their sympathies and homage to the fiery and destructive valor of the soldier, will see little

¹Ibid., p. 657.

attraction in the mild and peaceful spirit of Jesus."¹

In Channing's lecture on war in 1838, he speaks extensively of the gruesomeness of death in war and then of death and suffering in general, saying death in the latter instance becomes a blessed sleep. To illustrate the beauty and sacredness of such death, he pictures a family all dead, but locked in one another's arms. To portray the revolting side of death, he depicts another family, dying by dreadful outrage and bearing expressions of sickening hate. Speaking of war, relative to this last illustration, he says "Under its standard gather violence, malignity, rage, fraud, perfidy, rapacity and lust. If it only slew men, it would do little."² Channing proclaims that one of the worst atrocities of the military life in war is its perverted connection with death. He feels that death should bind men together in sympathy and self-forgetting love, not tear them apart. He asks how anything but the latter can be possible with unsolaced and unpitied death on the battlefield, leaving with his comrades the desire for revenge?

Farther on in the same lecture, Channing points out, that, to the professional soldier, there can be

¹ Ibid., p. 659.

² "Lecture on War", 1838, Works, 1883 Edit., p. 668.

no higher standard than human law or a human sovereign. But Channing says, "A declaration of war cannot sanction wrong, or turn murder into a virtuous deed."¹ These views and those cited in the outline of Channing's sermon preached in 1816, show fully (I believe) his full and vehement deprecation of the military life and how fully he had analyzed the factors involved.

Channing also dealt most instructively in several sermons on the duties and rights of citizens in relation to government, not only in his antislavery discourses, but also, in his lectures on war. In this respect, he broke completely with Boston Federalism. He placed the emphasis on ethical standards. In fact, Channing went so far as to preach a sermon on the duties of the citizen, immediately after war had been declared by the Union on England.

"The awakening of the new spirit may perhaps be held to date from the growing opposition to war that was an aftermath of the Napoleonic period with its huge debts and vast social suffering. The inhumanity of war profoundly impressed thoughtful minds that had come under the influence of the sociological movement, and when Channing in 1812 preached his first anti-war sermon, the new humanitarian spirit found expression."²

In this fearless sermon Channing reminds his hearers of their duties to the civil government.

¹Ibid., p. 676.

²V. L. Parrington, "The Romantic Revolution in America", Volume 11, pp. 341-342.

One of these, is respect for the social happiness it brings about and he defends it by saying that all legal regulations cannot equally benefit all, but the general good must be considered. However, Channing continues by pointing out the rights we may expect. "Government is instituted for one and a single end,-the benefit of the governed, the protection, peace, and welfare of society;..."¹ He declares that scripturally we are obligated to obey government, when it represents goodness as from God and that sovereigns should not have inalienable control over subjects without their scrutiny, for power has a tendency to corrupt. At the same time, Channing urges that civil commotion be carefully and calmly pondered as it is, by far, the worst of national evils.

Channing's thoughts here carried over into his opinions on the slavery question and his views in one case may be correlated with the other.

"By his own path he went back to the 18th century, and interpreting the functions and province of government in the light of Godwin's Political Justice, he arrived at the conception of a constantly diminishing political state that should eventually disappear."²

¹"Duties of The Citizen in Times of Trial or Danger", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 680.

²V. L. Parrington, Op. Cit., p. 335.

In the lecture on war in 1838, Channing points out that because a civil government declares war, it does not make that killing less of murder. He pleads that we let our human sensibilities guide us in making our judgment. In 1812, he argues that happily we have a constitution which allows for peaceable removal of those who invade our rights and above all, in a republic, we must retain freedom of expression. He asks if we are to hush all opposition to war, just because our government has declared it? On the contrary, he says, truth must not be obscured, but in our disagreement we must maintain a firmness without passion, for in proportion as people become enslaved to their passion, they fall into the hands of unprincipled aspirants.

In his discourse of 1835, he brings out the paradoxical nature of government. He believes that government has been established to limit personal wars and ravages.

"Human wisdom has been manifested in nothing more conspicuously than in civil institutions for repressing war, retaliation, and passionate resort to force, among the citizens of the same state."¹

However, according to Channing, while government restrains at home, it often arms these very citizens

¹"War", 1835, Works, 1883 Edit., p. 654.

with fire and sword against other communities in dreadful slaughter. And so the paradox! Government is seen to have a two-fold purpose; systematic killing, which is public war; and the systematic prevention of killing in individual crimes. Looking back over history, Channing believes the second has generally fostered the first. Thus Channing in his recorded remarks, tends to show civil government in a very illogical light and if not directly, at least suggestively, he gives the citizen a convenient loophole, if he will take it.

In his lecture on war in 1838, Channing suggests a number of possible remedies. First, he says a cure may be found in spreading the ideals of world-wide justice and love in the same spirit that Jesus eliminated selfishness and wickedness from the heart. He declares that ridding ourselves of war, without expelling selfishness and hate, would bring forth other evils of equal malignity.

"God has ordained that the wickedness within us shall always find its expression and punishment in outward evil. War is nothing more than a reflexion or image of the soul. It is the fiend within coming out."¹

He felt that the only remedy for war must be

¹"Lecture on War," 1838, Works, 1883 Edit., p. 670.

found in a Christian spirit and a religion which reveals man as the object of God's infinite love. Going even further he says that Christian love alone can supplant war, but first it must be an intelligent, moral, spiritual love, recognizing the value of human life and human nature. He uses the Quakers as illustrating the wrong application of this love.

"The Quakers, indeed, have protested against war as unchristian, but have done little towards bringing into clear light, and sending forth with new power, the spirit to which war is to yield."¹

Their weakness, he says, is in their too narrow sectarianism, and their seclusion from general affairs through fear of infection. He declares the missionary spirit to be all important, that real Christians must spread the true ideals of brotherhood, Channing admits the necessity of other remedies for war, but claims them impotent without union with the Christian spirit. The cessation of armament making, which was then an encouraging feature, at first consideration, Channing considers as vital. He calls attention to the underlying causes of this tranquility, as not being passive in motive. "Nations, resting from exhaustion, may be expected to renew their pernicious activity when their strength is renewed."² This

¹Ibid., p. 670.

²Ibid., p. 671.

period Channing refers to is very like the ten or fifteen years at the close of the World War. Nations throughout the world had felt the terrible cost of war and were turning where possible to internal development and trade expansion. Today, however, nations are making the greatest armament race in the history of the world. Such slogans as 'We must make sacrifices of comfort for security' are finding welcome acceptance. The hobgoblin of fear is once more making war inevitable. Channing was right when he said that the Christian spirit must necessarily be tied with these other remedies for war. Until a nation is imbued with the Christian spirit to the extent that it is willing to make the supreme sacrifice when others are restless, no world peace will ever be attained.

In 1835, Channing proposed another remedy for war. Herein he says that disputes should first be submitted to an unbiased umpire.

"To secure to itself this full consciousness of rectitude a nation should always desire to refer its disputes to an impartial umpire. It cannot too much distrust its own judgment in its own cause."¹

He continues to prove his logicalness by saying

¹"War", 1838, Works, 1883 Edit., p. 663.

that individuals have established public and private tribunals for their personal strifes.

Once again, Channing brings to our attention the necessity of considering the rectitude of war and being unqualifiedly assured of its justifiableness in the sight of God.

"To resolve on the destruction of our fellow-creatures without a command from conscience-a commission from God- is to bring on a people a load of infamy and crime."¹

In this same lecture Channing says that the law of love as exemplified by Jesus Christ, is the main solution to our problems and that the true dignity of man may be found as he is philanthropic towards every human being. With true eloquence he concludes his lecture,

"Prince of Peace! Saviour of Men! speak in thine own voice of love, power, and fearful warning; and redeem the world for which thou hast died from lawless and cruel passions, from the spirit of rapine and murder, from the powers of darkness and hell."²

In a letter written to Noah Worcester, Channing intimates that a consideration of the calamitousness of war from the Christian viewpoint is an excellent preventative.

"You must have been gratified with seeing the great disinclination of the community to second the

¹Ibid., p. 663.

²Ibid., p. 664.

recent war movements of the President. Undoubtedly, wise or prudential considerations had a large share in producing this reluctance; but I believe an important effect was produced by more Christian and moral views of war, and by the diffusion of juster views of military glory."¹

In a reply to John O'Sullivan, Esq., in 1841, he suggested that pacific measures cordially adopted by governments would go a long way towards reducing the war hazard. He feels, however, that the achievement of such a goal is yet far off. When we consider all of Channing's remedies for war, we see that beneath each of his proposals is the necessity for the practice of the law of love, the consciousness of rectitude and utter dependence on the will of the Almighty. In 1812, he voiced this when such a need was great.

"Thus faithful to ourselves and our country, and using vigorously every righteous means for restoring peace and confirming freedom, we may confidently leave the issue to the wise and holy providence of Him who cannot err, and who, we are assured, will accept and reward every conscientious effort for his own glory and the good of mankind."²

Early in this section on war, I said that Channing wasn't of the most extreme pacifists and after studying the history of his views, one might wonder why this statement was made. However, at the same

¹William Henry Channing, "Memoir of William Ellery Channing", Volume III, p. 22.

²"Duties of the Citizen in Time of Trial or Danger", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 684.

time that Channing was working for peace through his correspondence, the Massachusetts Peace Society and his pulpit, there was another group, called the Non-Resistants ardently striving for peace by declaring the absolute unlawfulness of war. Channing was much out of sympathy with this movement although he respected the sincerity of those who were members of it. In a letter to Miss J. E. Roscoe, Liverpool, Channing says that he could not bring himself into agreement with such a precept. He goes on to say that his interpretation of the meaning of the scriptures prevents his acceding.

"The precept, 'Resist not Evil', is plainly to be understood with much limitation, for, were it literally followed without exception, by the private individual and magistrate, all government, domestic and civil, would cease, and society would fall a prey to its worst members. The precept was not intended to forbid all resistance, but to forbid the bad passions from which resistance generally springs."¹

In his lecture of 1835, Channing elucidates further on this point when he admits that there are necessary occasions for war. Once again he declares non-resistance to be based on fallacy.

"It is, indeed, our duty as Christians to love our worst enemy, and to desire his true good; but we are to love not only our enemy, but our families,

¹William Henry Channing, Op. Cit., p. 19.

friends and country, and take a wise care of our own rights and happiness;...."¹

Very similarly, Channing expresses this view in 1816, when he disavows the literal interpretation of 'Resist not Evil'.

"We must remember that to the renunciation of reason in the interpretation of Scripture we owe those absurdities which have sunk Christianity almost to the level of heathenism. If the precept to resist not evil admit no exception, then civil government is prostrated; then the magistrate must in no case resist the injurious; then the subject must in no case employ the aid of the laws to enforce his rights. The very end and office of government is to resist evil men."²

Thus, we have Channing's approval of national defense. He believed very strongly that his methods for the preservation of peace would be more effective if rightly employed and the teaching that the principles and malignant passions on which war is based, constitute more efficient machinery for peace than the avowal of its complete unlawfulness.

On the whole, I find Channing to have been most meticulous and exceedingly honest in his various points about war. However, I cannot leave the summary of his thoughts without pointing out what I believe to be his one instance of inconsistency. Channing

¹"War", 1835, Works, 1883 Edit., p. 662.

²"War" , 1816, Works, 1883 Edit., p. 649.

began expounding pacific views in 1812 when he launched a courageous sermon after our declaration of war with Great Britian. In it, he declared in no uncertain terms, its unjustifiableness.

"There are, indeed, conditions in which war is justifiable, is necessary. It may be the last and only method of repelling lawless ambition, and of defending invaded liberty and essential rights. It may be the method which God's providence points out as furnishing the means of success. In these cases we must not shrink from war; though even in these we should deeply lament the necessity of shedding human blood. In such wars our country claims and deserves our prayers, our cheerful services, the sacrifice of wealth and even of life. In such wars we have one consolation, when our friends fall on the field of battle; we know that they have fallen in a just cause. Such conflicts, which our hearts and consciences approve, are suited to call forth generous sentiments, to breathe patriotism and fortitude through a community. Could I view the war in which we are engaged in this light, with what different feelings, my friends, should I address you!"¹

And at the close of this same paragraph, he says,

"We are precipitated into a war which, I think, cannot be justified, and a war, which promises not a benefit, that I can discover, to this country or the world."²

Throughout his sermons and lectures on war, he seconded this view by saying that war is only reasonable when the consciences of men impelled by

¹"Duties of the Citizen in Times of Trials or Danger", Works, 1883 Edit., pp. 679-680.

²Ibid., p. 680.

a high commission from God attest its rectitude. However, he preached another sermon in a time of danger when the British were invading Boston in the same war that he had declared unjustifiable. Herein he urges patriotism in defense of our country against invasion.

"Let us, then, cherish in ourselves and others a firm and heroic spirit. Let us fortify our minds by reflecting on the justice of our cause, that we are standing on our own shores and defending invaded rights. Let us show that our love of peace has not originated in timidity, and that the spirit of our fathers, still lives in their sons."¹

He goes on to place martyrdom for country next only to martyrdom for religion. Speaking of invasion, he admits our nation to have been the aggressor, but upholds our Christian right to defense, when in turn we are invaded.

"However unjustifiable may have been the measures whereby we have been reduced to this mournful extremity our right to our soil and our possessions remains unimpaired...."²

Channing's belief in national defense here upheld takes away somewhat from his position on peace. In reading any of his lectures or sermons on peace, one feels that he could countenance war only in very extreme cases, where there was no doubt as to its

¹"Duties of Citizens in Times of Trial or Danger", (1814) Works, 1883 Edit., p. 687.

²Ibid., p. 686.

justification. Here he admits its unlawful declaration, but when invasion occurs, which is a natural result of such a declaration, he upholds defense. This contradiction of attitude would therefore show itself in any instance of war and certainly weaken his position. Channing's pacifism has shown itself based on the Christian principles of love, brotherhood and loyalty to God and with this premise, I find his attitude in the sermon of 1814, illogical.

In general, Channing presents a very thorough study of war, its sources, causes, evil influences and remedies. He also gives a sound foundation for peace by his sermons, lectures, essays, and general correspondence and in addition his personal support of the Massachusetts Peace Society and deep admiration for Noah Worcester. Enough time has elapsed between his teaching and the present day to show that his precepts have stood the test of time. Certainly the ministry of all denominations and many laymen enthusiastic for peace have profited in the past and are welcoming his ideals today.

CHAPTER XII

CHANNING'S TEACHING ON SLAVERY

As we look back after a century's passing, no doubt there are those who feel that if Channing had thrown the weight of his influence and powers more actively into the field of thought, the end sought might have been reached in a calmer way. But when one considers the nature of the entrenched wrong, the material profits to be gained therefrom, one wonders if such forces could have been averted had Channing spoken sooner. We must remember that the many endeavors he supported always cost him supreme effort because of his physical infirmities. Though Channing was in fullest accord with the purpose of the Abolitionists, he never became one. His great work in behalf of antislavery was done in a quieter way, by his religious teachings from the pulpit and especially by the pen. His words were read by both North and South. Channing's thoughts were carefully weighed by the serious minded men of the nation. In calm, dispassionate manner, once he had spoken, he knew no retreat, he exposed the evils of slavery to the sight of all men, he expounded the moral and spiritual principles involved and then showed how they applied, and challenged the support of all true

citizens. In the compiled works of Channing we have eight discourses on the subject, a number of which are of considerable length. They constitute the best and most abiding literature on the subject of slavery that has come down to us. Though, as I have said, America is no longer under the degrading curse of slavery, the teachings of Channing repay our study as the most comprehensive work on its nature and challenge to thinking men.

Though the contributions Channing made to the subject of slavery were treatments of different aspects of the issue, each argument was based on the same fundamental convictions, convictions not reached by passion, but by long and calm meditation. Channing once said that he did not believe that God had entrusted the reform of the world to passion. Once however, he had reached a decision he spoke fearlessly and with all the eloquence and sincerity of his being. The following quotations voice the calmness and clarity of his thinking and his determination of purpose. In the introduction to his article on 'Emancipation' we find these words,

"As my hope for the country rests not on any party, but solely on our means of education, and on moral and religious influences, I ought not to be accused of wishing to give a political aspect to the antislavery cause. I am very unwilling that it should

take the form of a struggle for office and power. Still it has political relations; and of these I shall speak with freedom. The topic is an exciting one; but, as I look at it with perfect calmness, I hope I shall not disturb the minds of others."¹

What with such exciting events as the annexation of Texas, the destruction of the 'Philanthropist', an antislavery paper, published in Cincinnati, the mutiny or uprising of a cargo of slaves on board the 'Creole' and their escape to the West Indies, together with countless other incidents, there was need for a voice of calm and counsel. The following is proof of his fearless spirit. It is the close of his article on slavery in which he calmly analyzes the problem and comes to his convictions.

"I feel too much about the great subject on which I have written to be very solicitous about what is said of myself. I feel that I am nothing, that my reputation is nothing, in comparison with the fearful wrong and evil which I have labored to expose; and I should count myself unworthy the name of a man or a Christian, if the calumnies of the bad, or even the disapprobation of the good, could fasten my thoughts on myself and turn me aside from a cause which, as I believe, truth, humanity and God call me to maintain."²

In his introduction to 'Slavery', Channing's most important work on the subject, he states his aim, namely, "...to aid the reader in forming a just, moral, judgment of slavery."³ The question

¹"Emancipation", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 821.

²"Slavery", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 743.

³Ibid., p. 689.

of slavery is first and chiefly a moral question.

"The first question to be proposed by a rational being is, not what is profitable, but what is right."¹

Duty must be the primary object of human thought and pursuit.

"If we cast it down from its supremacy, if we inquire first for our interests, and then for our duties, we shall certainly err....This is the fundamental truth, the supreme law of reason....If human affairs are controlled, as we believe, by almighty rectitude and impartial goodness, then to hope for happiness from wrong-doing is as insane as to seek health and prosperity by rebelling against the laws of nature, by sowing our seed on the ocean, or making poison our common food. There is but one unfailing good; and that is, fidelity to the everlasting law written on the heart, and rewritten and republished in God's word."²

Upon the basis of reason, duty and right, Channing sought to clear away the fanaticism which had unsettled and obscured the thinking of both North and South. Though Channing was an impassioned champion of the antislavery cause, he pointed out the fruitlessness of hysterical action. No man should touch such a great humanitarian cause before he had taken pains to 'sanctify himself' of all wrath and uncharitableness. 'The injudicious vehemence' of those who rashly sought to instigate the slave to insurrection would ".... involve slave and master in common ruin."³

¹Ibid., p. 688.

²Ibid., pp. 688-689.

³Ibid., p. 689.

Channing's effort was to increase moral sentiment in the slave's behalf. The fact that the slave could not lift an arm for his own freedom obligated all free men in his behalf. Nowhere is Channing revealed more clearly as a Christian philanthropist than in his efforts to form public opinion so as to make slavery impossible. Christian philanthropy, enlightened goodness, poured forth . "...in prayers and persuasions, from the press and pulpit, from the lips and hearts of devoted men...."¹, is a force mightier than armies.

"The deliberate, solemn conviction of good men through the world, that slavery is a grievous wrong to human nature, will make itself felt. To increase this moral power is every man's duty.....Thus every man can do something to break the chain of the slave."²

Channing in his 'Slavery' considered eight different aspects of the problem. He sought to approach the subject with open-mindedness. His single object was "...to settle great principles."³

In the first place he pointed out that a man cannot justly be held and used as property. This truth so 'obvious' as to be 'self-evident', Channing seeks by illustrations to rescue from the platitudinous. Men cannot justly be made slaves; therefore no man

¹Ibid., p. 690.

²Ibid., p. 690.

³Ibid., p. 692.

can rightly be enslaved. Every human being has at least 'some rights'. There is an,

"essential equality of men....All men have the same rational nature and the same power of conscience, and all are equally made for indefinite improvement of these divine faculties, and for the happiness to be found in their virtuous use."¹

To think of the slave as property over which the owner has exclusive right violates a most sacred right, that of every man's right to his own person, mind and strength. "If a human being cannot without infinite injustice be seized as property then he cannot without equal wrong be held and used as such."² It is not as a criminal that the slave is held. And in this connection, Channing does not pass sentence upon the individual slave owner as a criminal. He is considered also a victim of the system. Channing's great point against seizing and using a man as property is that God created him as a rational, moral and immortal being. He is a person rather than a thing, a chattel or a brute. This "...glorious stamp as a rational and moral being, all the slave legislation and slave markets of worlds cannot efface."³ The immortal spirit in man, the likeness of God which he wears are beyond the power of

¹Ibid., p. 693.

²Ibid., p. 694.

³Ibid., p. 695.

government to take from him. When government seeks to do so the individual should not endure in silence but should protest ".....against wrong with the undivided energy of argument, entreaty, and solemn admonition."¹

In the second place, Channing pointed out that man has sacred rights, the gifts of God, and inseparable from the human nature. Slavery is an infraction of these rights. The great, fundamental right of human nature is the right of every human being, ".....to exercise his powers for the promotion of his own and others' happiness and virtue."² As every man is bound to employ his powers for his own and others' good so there is an obligation upon each to leave all unhampered for the accomplishment of this end. The view then beginning to prevail that individual rights should be modified or absorbed when the public good required, Channing termed 'the logic of despotism'. In monarchies, the divine right of kings swallowed up all others. In republics, the general good threatened the same thing. The protagonists of slavery of course were vehement that unless slavery was continued the South would be ruined. Channing

¹Ibid., p. 697.

²Ibid., p. 698.

reminded them that no greater calamity could befall a people than to profit by crime. If certain rights and powers are to be surrendered, why not all? "The great end of government is to repress...."¹, not to sanctify wrong. "Its highest function is to protect the weak against the powerful...."² From his fundamental premise Channing deduces the following as among the particular rights of the individual. Every man has the right to acquire knowledge, to inquire into his duty, to use his God-given means for bettering his condition. He has the right to be respected according to his moral worth; a right to be regarded as a member of the community; the right to protection by impartial laws; the right to be exempted from punishment as long as he respects the rights of others. He has a right to an equivalent for his labor. He has a right to sustain domestic relations and enjoy the happiness thereof. In slavery human rights are denied. The national wealth should not be preferred to national virtue and rectitude.

In section three entitled, 'Explanations' he seeks to prevent the misapplication of principles.

¹Ibid., p. 699.

²Ibid., p. 699.

He maintains that slavery does not benefit the slave and the state as is the contention of many. Channing urges eventual emancipation. The gold of the slave is 'cankered' and slavery cannot but work a 'terrible vengeance' in its deadening effect upon the 'moral feelings' of a community. Better poverty than the profits of evildoing.

In section four, Channing dwells at length on the evils of slavery. He says, "Evil is permitted by the Creator that we should strive against it, in faith, and hope, and charity."¹ In treating these evils he does not pretend to minimize yet seeks to present the true picture without exaggeration. A slave to be a good tool must have his spirit crushed. Therefore, that the slave should yield himself to intemperance, theft and sensual excess is to be expected. The moral influence of slavery is throughout debasing. Channing notes this also of its intellectual and domestic influences especially of the unprotected female slave. "...a slave-country reeks with licentiousness."² The political influence of slavery jeopardizes the free institutions of a nation. The violation of the liberty of others

¹Ibid., p. 707.

²Ibid., p. 716.

is no way to assert the sacredness of our own.

"Free institutions rest on two great political virtues, the love of liberty and the love of order."¹ Slave-holding, when maintained by selfishness and determination, "Creates a burning zeal for the rights of a privileged class, but not for the rights of men."² Channing considers some of the so-called advantages of slavery, such as the kindness of many masters, the loyalty of the slave and that in many cases religion is taught them, but concludes that the advantages in no way mitigate the evils.

"An institution so founded in wrong, so imbued with injustice, cannot be made a good.....Slavery is thus radically, essentially evil. Every good man should....use every virtuous influence, that an institution so blighting to human nature may be brought to an end."³

In section five, Channing considers the argument which the Scriptures are thought to furnish in favor of slavery. He felt that this argument was an inexcusable perversion of Scripture. He says, "It is a plain rule of scriptural criticism that particular texts should be interpreted according to the general tenor and spirit of Christianity."⁴ And yet there

¹Ibid., p. 717.

²Ibid., p. 718.

³Ibid., p. 722.

⁴Ibid., p.724.

are those, who, "....on the ground of two or three passages, which admit different constructions,.... make Christianity the minister of Slavery, the forger of chains for those whom it came to free."¹ The passing of another century of biblical criticism but vindicates Channing in his interpretation. The Bible contains spiritual teaching not for one age but for every age. Because it contains teaching as to the duty of servants and slaves does not justify the holding of slaves any more than the counsel to turn the other cheek when smitten, justifies the striker of the blow.

In section six, Channing offers some suggestions on the means of removing slavery. His concern is with the slaveholder for he alone can fully answer the problem. An enforced emancipation Channing felt would result in chaos. Let the slave,

"....feel that liberty has been wrung from an unwilling master, who would willingly replace the chain, and jealousy, vindictiveness, and hatred would spring up to blight the innocence and happiness of his new freedom, and to make it a peril to himself and all around him."²

Even such an emancipation, Channing felt would be preferable to unending bondage. Channing's hope

¹Ibid., p.724.

²Ibid., p. 725.

was that the slave-holders should realize the injustice of holding human beings as property, and recognize their 'essential human rights'. He did not propose "....that the slave should be immediately set free from all his present restraints."¹ The slaves should be prepared for self-support, as the great step toward the removal of slavery. As the colored man learned to labor as his first lesson, to teach him to work for himself should be attended with no great difficulty. The abolishing of the slave-market would remove "....one of the chief obstructions to emancipation...."² The legislatures and the church should make emancipation their great object. The truth should be spread on the subject of slavery. No state can, "....escape the power of strong, deep, enlightened opinion."³ Breathe into the slave-holder the 'spirit' and 'fervent purpose' of emancipation and this stain will be wiped away. But, "....without this spirit, no eloquence of man or angel...."⁴ can accomplish it.

Section seven contains some remarks on abolitionism. Certainly Channing cannot be numbered among the abolitionists. Though he felt every man should feel

¹Ibid., p. 726.

²Ibid., p. 728.

³Ibid., p. 729.

⁴Ibid., p. 729.

himself bound to exert his influence for removing slavery, he felt that the term had become so narrowed as to signify only those promoting immediate emancipation. He held this to be one of their errors. He condemns mobs and lawless force in suppressing abolitionism as a worse evil.

"One great principle, which we should lay down as immovably true, is, that if a good work cannot be carried on by the calm, self-controlled, benevolent spirit of Christianity, then the time for doing it has not come."¹

'Fervent zeal' ought to be joined with 'deliberate wisdom and universal charity'. The main concern is "...not what means are most effectual, but, what means are sanctioned by the moral law and by Christian love."² It is in this section that Channing's oft quoted words are found, "...it is not true that God has committed the great work of reforming the world to passion."³ This section of his article on 'Slavery' published in 1835 is basic to his article on 'The Abolitionists' published in 1836. There he reiterates the same views in expanded form. In his famous 'Letter to Henry Clay, On the Annexation of Texas to the United States' in 1837,

¹Ibid., p. 734.

²Ibid., p. 734.

³Ibid., p. 734.

the thoughts of these sections are further expanded in his strong argument against annexing Texas to the United States. He felt that annexation would perpetuate slavery in the old states as well as spread it in new territories.

The last section of this comprehensive article is devoted to 'Duties' of the free States, toward the South and towards themselves. Among these, he enumerates, being confident in well-doing, using all good influences towards abolition and holding fast to principles, no matter what the struggle or reproach. "Let the free States be firm, but also patient, forbearing, and calm."¹ As one reads this article one cannot help but be impressed by its sincerity, sanity and charity. The problem of slavery occupied his thought from his early youth. This article wasn't written until 1835. It embodies years of meditation and conviction. We have eight lengthy articles from his pen written from 1835 to 1842. There were many at this period, not only in the South but in the North as well, who assured themselves of the innocence of slavery. Channing, writing with such calm sincerity and benevolence,

¹Ibid., p. 739.

without prejudice, yet with a crusading zeal, did much to expose slavery in its true character. To him, slavery was always clearly revealed as a most unjust wrong and blighting vice. His work of pen and pulpit, more than any other single force, convinced the sober thought of the nation. Channing spoke to the conscience of the individual as an apostle of justice to all humanity. Partisan of no party, Channing was an independent thinker. He was convinced of the power of individuals of pure and lofty aim, unswerving friends of justice. ".... Such men are securities against the adoption of criminal ends or criminal means."¹ Among such single-hearted men, it is interesting to note what is said of one in particular.

"In their front rank--perhaps at their head--is Gerrit Smith; a man worthy of all honor for his overflowing munificence, for his calm yet invincible moral courage, for his Christian liberality, embracing men of every sect and name, and for his deep, active, inexhaustible sympathy with the sinful, suffering, and oppressed."²

In the little hamlet of Peterboro, in the hills of Central New York State, during the month of August, Emancipation Day witnesses a pilgrimage to the homestead of Gerrit Smith. The old mansion was recently destroyed

¹W. E. Channing, "Remarks on The Slavery Question", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 817.

²Ibid., p. 817.

by a disastrous fire but there are many relics of pre-slavery times. The visitor views the Underground Railway, along which many slaves were conveyed by night to freedom in Canada. There is an old shed which Gerrit Smith used as an office for the distribution of parcels of land to Negroes, thereby enfranchising them. Each year the old homestead attracts a large gathering of both negroes and whites who pay tribute to this benevolent man who did not stint his sympathy for the oppressed.

Channing, though few men were held in greater honor by both North and South, did not escape the wrath of the protagonists of the cause of slavery. Just as he was the target of numerous articles condemning his theology, so criticisms of his views of slavery were numerous. One of the more moderate articles is called, "Remarks on Dr. Channing's 'Slavery' by a Citizen of Massachusetts." Well-written by a man, evidently of some professional vocation, it consists of eight chapters, one for each of Dr. Channing's articles on slavery. It likens Dr. Channing to Peter the Hermit for his misguided enthusiasm and preaching. It charges him with inconsistency, impractical idealism and with preaching a doctrine of insurrection. This pamphlet

is especially interesting as it reveals the attitude of mind of one prejudiced to slavery. Though he professes to admit that slavery is an evil, "Abolition would bring desolation upon the white man and death to the slave."¹ The slave is pictured as a ferocious wild beast, a lion or elephant which when taken from its native forests must be kept in subjection by iron bars and the keeper's whip. Rather than face the perils of amalgamation through the freedom of the slave this writer says, "I will brave my share of all the responsibility of keeping him in slavery."²

Channing was particularly interested in the emancipation of the slave in the West Indies which took place on the first of August, 1834. In 1840, he wrote a lengthy article on the progress of the emancipated islands. The success of emancipation in the West Indies was a great satisfaction to him and he wished it to be extensively known. Extensive data are given to show that emancipation had been accompanied with little pecuniary loss. This for the benefit of those who estimated freedom in terms of "a few hogsheads of sugar."³ Channing felt that the great emancipating influence in the West Indies

¹"Remarks on Dr. Channing's Slavery by a Citizen of Massachusetts", p. 35.

²Ibid., p. 45.

³W. E. Channing, "Emancipation", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 830.

had been Christianity.

"From the times of Clark and Wilberforce down to the present day, the friends of the slave, who have pleaded his cause and broken his chains, have been Christians; and it is from Christ, the Divine Philanthropist, from the inspiration of His cross, that they have gathered faith, hope, and love, for the conflict."¹

This is also the note of cheer and assurance with which Channing prepared his famous 'Lenox Address'. As his feeble strength allowed, he prepared a speech on the benefits of emancipation in the West Indies, feeling that some voice should be raised to speak of the act by which eight hundred thousand souls had been given their freedom. On the first of August, 1842, it being the anniversary of emancipation in the British West Indies, and just a few weeks before his death, Channing gathered together a few friends and neighbors to hear this message, the last public address of his life. What his Baltimore Sermon was on the subject of theology, his Lenox Address was for slavery. His spirit, for the time triumphant over physical weakness, his glowing powers reach their heights of love and benevolence. With marvelous clarity and brevity, he presents his main views. He thanks God that eight hundred thousand human beings

¹ Ibid., p. 835.

have been made free. He attributes their freedom to the "Christian principle acting on the mind and heart of a great people."¹ In it he sees "That Christianity has not come into the world in vain."² The lesson of the day, he felt, was the safety of emancipation. Prophecies that the islands would be desolated by violence were disproved by fact and truth. Conditions had vastly changed for the better. Christian truth and energy he felt would so work upon the United States that the two million and a half of human beings held as slaves in the South would be made free. Let us remember that Channing spoke a quarter of a century before his great hope was realized and the slaves were free. Without a doubt he contributed much to the determination in the hearts of the American people to abolish slavery from the United States. Today our colored Americans who thank Lincoln for his 'Proclamation' may well think with grateful hearts of the pioneer work of men like Channing. Longfellow said of him,

"Well done! Thy words are great and bold;
At times they seem to me,
Like Luther's, in the days of old,
Half-battles for the free."³

¹W. E. Channing, "Address on the Anniversary of Emancipation in The British West Indies", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 918.

²Ibid., p. 918.

³Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "To William E. Channing", The Poetical Works p. 42.

Lowell laid this tribute upon his grave:--

"Farewell! good man, good angel now! this hand
Soon, like thine own, shall lose its cunning too;
Soon shall this soul, like thine, bewildered stand,
Then leap to tread the free, unfathomed blue.

When that day comes, O, may this hand grow cold,
Busy, like thine, for Freedom and the Right;
O, may this soul, like thine, be ever bold
To face dark Slavery's encroaching blight!"¹

¹James Russel Lowell, "Elegy on The Death of
Dr. Channing", The Complete Poetical Works, p. 106.

CHAPTER XII

CHANNING'S TEACHING ABOUT INTEMPERANCE

Dr. Channing, as a sincere religious teacher of principles conducive to the spiritual freedom and growth of every individual in the whole society of Christendom gave much thought and effort to the practical teaching of these principles. The poor, the enslaved, the criminal and the intemperate found him always a sympathetic friend and he continually devoted his powers to an effort to help them attain a better state. He recognized intemperance as a powerful enemy of man's good, preying upon both rich and poor, reducing its victims to crime and pauperism. Channing's teaching on intemperance merits our consideration here because of the attention he devoted to it. He, himself, admitted his inability "....to render any important aid....by novelty of suggestion."¹ We find his teaching summarized in his address on Temperance before the Massachusetts Temperance Society, Boston, 1837.

Channing held that "....the great, essential evil of intemperance....is the voluntary extinction of reason. The great evil is inward or spiritual."²

¹W. E. Channing, "Address on Temperance", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 99.

²Ibid., p. 100.

The intemperate man demoralizes his reasoning powers. But Channing pointed out that too often we think only of the "...consequences of vice, and too little at the vice itself."¹ For example, poverty is no dishonor if it be innocent, if beneath the rags, there be "...the spirit, energy, reason and virtues of a man."²

Among the causes contributing to intemperance, Channing lists the imperfect state of society in keeping so many in intellectual ignorance and causing a lack of self-respect, and a love of excitement, which when unsatisfied seeks unnatural stimulants. "Inward, spiritual improvement, I believe, is the only sure remedy for social evils."³ The fundamental means for the cure of intemperance, Channing lists as the multiplication of spiritual employments, in which he includes the extension of fraternal intercourse, improvements in the means of education, and the study of good literature and the cultural arts. "... people should be guarded against temptation to unlawful pleasures by furnishing the means of

¹Ibid., p. 101.

²Ibid., p. 100.

³Ibid., p. 104.

innocent ones."¹ He recommends music, respectable places for dancing and good theatrical performances, because men often congregate in taverns through restlessness, monotony and boredom. He ends by urging the discontinuance of the use and sale of intoxicating beverages. Every temperate man should totally abstain from their use or he abets the evil. Public opinion should be educated to regard ".... the vending of spirits....as a great public evil."² Channing did not however put his trust, as many did, in public opinion as the chief method of subduing the evil. He said, "Opinion no longer affords that steady guidance which in former times supplied the place of private judgment and individual principle."³ He termed such opinion a great and useful influence but it must "....act rationally, generously, not passionately, tyrannically, and with the spirit of persecution."⁴ The growth of intelligence and freedom, he considered inestimable defenses against intemperance. They nourish self-respect and furnish the means of improvement.

¹Ibid., p. 110.

²Ibid., p. 114.

³Ibid., p. 115.

⁴Ibid., p. 116.

Channing was always the champion of the individual. His teaching and energies were directed with that end in view. With such views of the worth of individual freedom and growth, he never became a member of a temperance society, though he honored such societies and their members. He has this to say, "Let the temperate become a party, and breathe the violence of party, and they will raise up a party as violent as their own."¹ He felt the insufficiency of legislation, or coercive measures in reforming men and how fully his views have been vindicated by the collapse of Prohibition in America. "Men cannot be driven into temperance."² He said that the great end of society is human improvement; that moral force exerted by increasing numbers of enlightened, Christian individuals, can best resist intemperance. "Christianity is the mighty power before which intemperance is to fall."³ "On this foundation, we ought to build, more and more, until a life-giving influence shall penetrate all classes of society."⁴ What good is accomplished by lopping off the branches of intemperance, while its root

¹Ibid., p. 116.

²Ibid., p. 116.

³Ibid., p. 109.

⁴Ibid., p. 109.

survives? All society must be improved, if reform measures are to really function and endure. Today the great movement for temperance in America is starting all over again. Temperance by legislation failed. Other methods of control are being tried in many countries. None has attained its end. After the passing of an hundred years, the principles Channing enunciated still challenge us.

CHAPTER XIII

CHANNING'S TEACHING RESPECTING THE POOR

Dr. Channing was always in deepest concern for the welfare of the needy and the great masses of people who toil. His heart went out to them as brother to brother. He felt that a laborer and the great privilege of labor were instrumentalities of God and should be directed and used with the deepest sense of gratitude and wisdom. The laborer should never be regarded as a machine, or mere means to an end, but as the end itself. The man who earns his daily bread by the sweat of his brow labors for a much loftier purpose than is commonly supposed, for by his labor many live. Channing believed that the laboring classes should feel their fellowship with all men, that this feeling should be reciprocated and that it should serve as one of the great unifying and uplifting factors of life.

When Channing saw the dawn of a better day dispelling the gloom of doctrinal despair, he wished to share the joy and light of this better day not only with the dogmatist but with the man of the pew who went out to plow and plant. And so Channing translated the doctrine of the dignity of human nature into practical terms. Though it was not his lot to

labor with his hands, he would devote the powers of his mind and spirit to the setting forth of ideas that would elevate and strengthen those who did. What Channing did, he did conscientiously and well. He never spared himself in trying to make this world a better place for his fellowmen, especially those who were unfortunate, or who worked under unjust conditions.

To this end we find Channing keenly interested in any movement that gave promise of ameliorating labor and living conditions. He was not only a pioneer in this field but also was continually devoting his powers to the analysis of the reasons for the unjust and evil conditions prevailing, and pointing to the necessary remedies that must be made. Channing was in no sense inclined toward the left wing in his social gospel. His sensitive and loving nature would have rejected the thought of violent means as a way to remedy social evils. He never looked with favor upon pulling down the mountains of capitalistic accumulations of property to fill in the valleys of human misery and want. Channing advocated extending the helping hand from brother to brother, from class to class. He was always an ardent idealist. However, his earlier ministry was largely spent in

the activities of a busy parish. A minister occupied with pastoral duties and the task of building up a church rarely finds time for wider achievements. However, in 1824 the congregation of the Federal St. Church gave him an associate. One wonders how Channing with his enfeebled health had accomplished the work that he had. Thus relieved for long periods of time from the demanding work of his church, Channing entered upon a wider sphere of endeavor than even the leadership of the Unitarian cause. Now he had time and opportunity to more fully apply the doctrines he had been preaching such as the loving character of God, the worth of man, and the importance of human liberty. A leader advocating these doctrines with all sincerity would inevitably become a social reformer and shepherd of the great mass of needy humanity. His position and writings on slavery are important and merit special consideration. Channing was largely instrumental in establishing the Ministry at Large in Boston and making it a success. He took a deep interest in the subject of homes for the poor and aged; female employment agencies, and the reformation of prostitutes. Channing's great idea of the worth of man, or the dignity of human nature, swept away the old doctrine of total depravity.

He laid a firm foundation for many practical reforms. His idea of man's potential value impelled him to place high the work of education, reform, charity, and the general uplifting of men.

On the basis of this premise, Channing sought to dignify the labor of men's hands. The application of another of his great principles, the sacredness of individual liberty made him the powerful foe of every form of slavery whether it be of body or soul. Could he have found a better or more noble purpose than the elevation of all men by revealing to them their true nature and destiny?

Channing was always interested in social and philanthropic movements, but it was in what is generally considered the third and last period of his activity, that we find him giving himself almost exclusively to these interests. Here was a man giving to his fellows the lofty idea of the rectitude of the character of God. He had not originated this conception, but in the times when many were in the darkness of Calvinistic doctrines, Channing's powers of thoughtful analysis had formulated this brighter principle, and preaching it as he did with such masterly eloquence and powerful sincerity, it made great progress. Thereafter, such gloomy prospects

as eternal torment, infants dying without a chance, and the election of a portion of us to be saved and ~~an~~ another portion to be damned regardless of merit, or blame, gradually lost their gloomy power upon the lives of men. But all this great good we have considered in the more theoretical aspects of Channing's teaching. They were accomplished in times of great controversy in the period between the years 1815 and 1830, when he was still active pastor of the Federal St. Church. From 1830 to 1842, or until the time of his death, we find Channing devoting himself to the practical application of these three principles, namely, the worth of man, the sacredness of individual liberty and the rectitude of God. With this in mind, let us consider how soundly and solidly, he wove these teachings into the form of eloquent sentences that could hardly fail to find target in the heart and mind of his hearers. One of the basic tests of great preaching is its power to reach the heart and move it by the impartation or communication of uplifting truth. No mind was more fertile in its abundant possession of such truth, no one had greater skill in the communication of it, no one had a greater impulse to impart it than William Ellery Channing.

Channing delivered an address at Boston in September, 1838, on the subject of self-culture. With marked interest, he accepted this invitation to speak to men who were occupied by manual labor. He was especially interested in their work and in devising means to help them. Channing felt that though the position of the working man was obscure, it was not on this account less important. To Channing, a man was always great as a man, whatever his lot in life. Whenever Channing saw men making an effort to improve themselves, it confirmed his belief in man's inherent worth. He liked to think of a social order in which the means to satisfy the desire for self-improvement in everyman's heart would be available.

With characteristic humility, Channing apologized for his inability to treat such an extensive subject in a single discourse, and then went on to treat the subject of self-culture in a most comprehensive and helpful manner. His method was simple and basic. First, the idea of self-culture was considered, then the means to it; and finally the objections to prevailing views.

Channing's view of man was a lofty one. He thought of man in terms of what he could become as

a being created in the image of God. Growth is the principle of man's life. Failure to grow is sin. All life grows, whether it be in plant, or animal, or the human mind. We cultivate a thing in order to help it grow. Channing believed that every man was a child of God; every living soul a part of the Infinite Spirit of the one great Father of all mankind. Men were created with the power for self-improvement and according to Channing's view of the divine purpose every man did have this chance. This was the sense in which all men were born equal, for obviously, all men were not born with equal gifts, or size, or strength. It was designed in the Father's wisdom that men might supplement each other's needs, not prey upon them. Believing, as Channing did, with all the sincerity of his powers, in this principle of the equality of all men, he could not but feel his duty and obligation to all his brothers who were in need, either through their own weakness or the fickleness of the social system. The principle that man is a moral being capable of self-improvement and growth is the trunk of his teachings regarding self-culture. It is rooted in the rich soil of faith in man and a loving God. The first of the several branches that spring from this growing tree

of the life of men is the moral one. In every man, no matter how narrow or how selfish, there is the idea of duty as an inner voice, which speaks in opposition to mere self-interest and in behalf of impartial justice, universal goodwill and brotherhood. Call this deep, universal principle in the nature of man, the conscience, the reason or the moral sense, it is the most important power we possess for in its right development everything depends. Though the passions, at times, may clamor with louder voice, they cannot drown the authoritative tones of conscience. The growth of moral power in man is unlimited, Channing argues, for it partakes of the nature of God. This is the life of the second branch of self-culture, namely, the religious. We have the senses to discern and utilize the material universe, so also, a spiritual power which apprehends the Infinite and Eternal. This power will not rest until it knows the source of its being, the all comprehending mind. The religious and the moral principles within us are closely connected; they grow together. We discern in God, attributes of universal love and impartial justice. The religious and moral voices within us command us to become like the God we worship. These principles nourish the intellectual branch of self-culture. We all recognize man's intellectual

capacity, that power which thinks, reasons and judges. It commands more attention than any other of our faculties. It is our instrument for the attainment of truth. Often men think of education and self-improvement as merely the attainment of knowledge. Let not the intellect be exalted above the moral principle. Moral discipline is essential for sound, healthy intellectual vigor. In gaining truth Channing said, disinterestedness is the very soul of virtue. It must be sought with an open mind, no matter how it bears upon the interests of the one seeking it, and it must be followed wherever it leads no matter what persecution or loss is involved. Truth perverted becomes not light but darkness. When self-interest is removed thought advances and expands. Ability divorced from rectitude becomes more of a demon than a god. Intellectual culture is not the accumulation of a whole lot of unrelated facts or petty details but a calibre of thought which may be turned at will upon any matter upon which judgment must be exercised. Based on such a deposit of knowledge one might define intelligence as the ability to adapt oneself to circumstance on the spot. Channing said,

"....men had for ages seen pieces of wood, stones, metals falling to the ground. Newton seized

on these particular facts,...thus, giving us a grand principle, which, we have reason to think, extends to and controls the whole outward creation.....To build up that strength of mind which apprehends and cleaves to great universal truths, is the highest intellectual self-culture; and here I wish you to observe how entirely this culture agrees with that of the moral and religious principles of our nature, of which I have previously spoken. In each of these, the improvement of the soul consists in raising it above what is narrow, particular, individual, selfish, to the universal and unconfined. To improve a man is to liberalize, enlarge him in thought, feeling, and purpose. Narrowness of intellect and heart, this is the degradation from which all culture aims to rescue the human being."¹

In the next place Channing taught that self-improvement is social. It is the unfolding and purifying of the instinctive affections which bind all men together. A man may love his child at first instinctively. But when his love is infused with the religious principle, so that the parent regards his child as an intelligent, spiritual, immortal being and desires first of all to make him a disinterested, noble, worthy child of God and friend of his race, then, that instinct rises until it resembles the paternal love of God.

As his last point Channing emphasizes the practical nature of self-culture. It trains us for action, makes us more efficient in our work, gives us resourcefulness, especially in times of trial and

¹"Self-Culture", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 17.

danger. Channing mentions two aspects of self-culture that are often overlooked, but which are of meaning for those who live in humble station. There is a beauty, wrought by the Creator's hand, in every man. Man has the power to unfold this element within him by the cultivation of those moral, religious, intellectual, social principles which are the glory of every man's spiritual nature. The second often overlooked point is man's power of utterance. "A man was not made to shut up his mind in itself; but to give it voice and to exchange it for other minds. Speech is one of our grand distinctions from the brute."¹ Lack of grace in speech and in the power of clear utterance is a most important distinction in rank. If a man improves his speech it opens to him wider opportunities for intercourse with others, which in itself is a great means of improvement. To gain this power of utterance should be a part of self-culture. Channing realized that his views regarding man as a being of infinite worth were disregarded by many. He placed little value on any culture that did not give perpetual impulse and expansion to the free spiritual powers of every human being. Work and the knowledge of a trade are important. But

¹Ibid., p. 19.

they should not be allowed to become limitations. Men possess faculties which can transcend their manual labors. Poems, great ideas, systems of theology and philosophy have come into being while men have toiled with their hands. Man is to be educated because he is a man, not because he is to make things. A laborer must not be thought of merely as an instrument capable of work. He is a rational, moral being and as such ought never to be enslaved. He is necessarily an end, not a means. He is brother, father, friend, husband, Christian. Each man is to do a great work, that of unfolding his spiritual capacities and educating his own children. This is convincing proof of man's need of an education and culture as yet undreamed of by this human race.

The chief and inclusive means of culture, Channing said, is to determine solemnly to make the most and the best of the powers which have been given us by God. An earnest man with the means of self-improvement, teachers, books, libraries, etc., at his disposal, once he has caught the idea of self-culture, has already scaled halfway to the attainment of it.

An important point in moving a man to seek self-improvement is to comprehend the practicableness of it. It is within the reach of every man. It is the

very end of life. The grander volumes, nature, revelation, the human soul, and human life, are unfolded freely to all. Great men, such as Homer, or Plato, Channing said, developed without the help of many studies which today are deemed essential. Self-culture never lacks the means, where the desire for it and the purpose to attain it are deep and earnest in the soul.

Channing pointed out that good books are a means whereby we may know the thoughts of superior minds. They help us free ourselves from our own narrow thoughts. We are all prone to maintain the status quo, to make our days, our thoughts, our manners of dress, mere repetitions.

"A man who wakes up to the consciousness of having been created for progress and perfection, looks with new eyes on himself and the world in which he lives....A man in the common walks of life, who has faith in perfection, in the unfolding of the human spirit, as the great purpose of God, possesses more the secret of the universe, perceives more the harmonies or mutual adaptations of the world without and the world within him, is a wiser interpreter of Providence, and reads nobler lessons of duty in the events which pass before him, than the profoundest philosopher who wants this grand central truth."¹

Channing believed that to possess this great truth was not a gift only to the favored few but was possible to all men in every walk of life.

¹ Ibid., p. 25.

Channing felt that labor was dignified. Manual labor performed honestly, builds up in the laborer one of the great principles of morality and religion. Labor is a school of benevolence as well as justice. A man by his labors, not only works to support himself, but he serves others. The consciousness of usefulness is one of the blessings of manual labor. Work, well done, is an incentive to the mind's growth.

In the lecture, "On the Elevation of the Laboring Classes", Channing says, "....by the elevation of the laborer, I do not understand that he is to be raised above the need of labor."¹ Man owes his growth to the striving of will, the overcoming of difficulty which we call effort. Manual labor is a great good. But when enforced, as the sole work of life, it does harm. Man has intellect, heart, imagination, taste as well as bone and muscle. Life should be so diversified as to call forth the whole man. Channing pointed out the unfortunate fact that civilization did not realize this. Manual toil is increased and at the same time its nature is made less favorable to culture of the mind. Channing

¹"On The Elevation of the Laboring Classes", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 38.

observes that the laborer ought to be a student, a thinker, an intellectual man, as well as a laborer.

Usually, Channing closes a sermon or discourse by a strong presentation of the influence of Christ, or Christianity, as the uplifting force of life. However, in the discourse on self-culture he merely mentions it. He concludes by emphasizing the means at the disposal of everyone for self-improvement, namely, public lectures, societies for the interchange of ideas and the frank discussion of problems, and worthy books of fiction, history and biography. Walter Scott, is especially mentioned. In such ways self-improvement may be found a pleasure as well as a benefit.

Labor and self-culture are not irreconcilable. Channing believed that, in proportion as men become universally elevated and educated, shorter and better processes of labor will be found. Thus, more and more leisure for self-improvement will be available for men. In concluding his lecture on self-culture, Channing gives thanks to God for what has been gained. But much remains to be done, and in a truly eloquent and moving conclusion Channing the preacher and lover of men speaks,

"What a vast amount of ignorance, intemperance, coarseness, sensuality, may still be found in our

community.....You cannot, without guilt and disgrace, stop where you are....Let what you have gained be an impulse to something higher. Your nature is too great to be crushed. You were not created what you are, merely to toil, eat, drink, and sleep, like the inferior animals. If you will, you can rise.Resolve earnestly on self-culture. Make yourselves worthy of your free institutions, and strengthen and perpetuate them by your intelligence and your virtue."¹

Channing carried to their practical conclusion the principles he preached. He spared no effort in promoting organizations for the improvement of the lot of poor people and laboring men. He lent his support to such agencies as the Ministry at Large, The Benevolent Fraternity of Churches, The Apprentice's Library. He interested himself in vocational schools, employment societies, and homes for the poor.

In a sermon entitled, "Honor due to all men", Channing speaks of the new relationship which Christianity established between men by which we feel our spiritual brotherhood, our derivation from one heavenly parent and the bond of one divine life in our own and in all souls. Christianity is revealing to men their own nature and teaching them to honor all who partake it. Also, Christianity has but begun a mighty work of reformation, which shall silently continue until new ties, revelations and understandings

¹"Self-Culture", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 36.

shall take the place of the old .

"The soul is to be regarded with a religious reverence hitherto unfelt; and the solemn claims of every being to whom this divine principle is imparted are to be established on the ruins of those pernicious principles, both in church and state, which have so long divided mankind into the classes of the abject many and the self-exalting few."¹

In the light of Christianity men are

"....beings cared for by God, to whom he has given his Son, on whom he pours his Spirit, and whom he has created for the highest good in the universe, for participation in his own perfections and happiness."²

Another important sermon of Channing's is entitled, "Ministry for the Poor."³ It was preached before the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches, Boston, April 9, 1835. His text was; "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor."⁴

This society to which he preached had been formed for the purpose of providing a ministry for the poor and the communication of spiritual blessings to the destitute of the city. Channing feeling as he did most compassionately for the outward wants and sufferings of men as well as for their inner needs, spoke on this occasion of the claims of the

¹"Honor Due to All Men", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 67.

²Ibid., p. 70.

³Discourse delivered before the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches. 1835.

⁴Luke 4: 18.

poor as moral and spiritual beings. With deep and discerning sensibility and out of fullest sympathy, he spoke of the unhappy influences and evils of poverty upon lives subjected to it. He pointed out the true meaning of wealth. How important that wealth be used unselfishly for the welfare of society. Otherwise it becomes a snare and a curse. What a task and challenge reposes upon a minister who seeks to enlighten the understanding of men and to better the relationships of man with man. In this sermon he indicated the breadth of the field in which a minister must labor.

"The true cultivation of a human being consists in the development of great moral ideas; that is, the ideas of God, of duty, of right, of justice, of love, of self-sacrifice, of moral perfection as manifested in Christ, of happiness, of immortality, of Heaven. The elements, or germs of these ideas, belong to every soul, constitute its essence, and are intended for endless expansion. These are the chief distinctions of our nature; they constitute our humanity. To unfold these is the great work of our being. The light in which these ideas rise on the mind, the love which they awaken, and the force of will with which they are brought to sway the outward and inward life,--here, and here only, are the measures of human cultivation."¹

In 1834, two young men by the names of Charles F. Barnard and Frederick T. Gray were ordained as ministers at large in Boston. The ordination charge was delivered by Dr. Channing.

¹"Ministry for the Poor", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 80.

As a charge to these two young men the topic was, "Preaching The Gospel to the Poor." He emphasizes the power of love, Christlike love. That love which is illustrated by Christ's spirit which carried him to his cross, is mightier than the sword. Love is a common tongue which men can understand. It can pierce consciences and move hearts which have been hardened against all other influences. Love redeems the lost and brings them back to the Father. It is the chief power of the ministry. Then Channing emphasizes this aspect of love,

"You must love the poor; you must also respect them; and in truth, respect is the very soul of the love which I have enjoined. Honor the poor man.... Never let the man be lost in the beggar.....Go to the poor to awaken in them the consciousness of their relation to God, and of their immortality..... Remember that he is as free as yourselves and can only be carried forward by a spring of improvement in his own soul.....Show him that in his poverty he still has God's best gifts,--an immortal soul, and the means of its redemption and glory."¹

In summarizing Channing's teaching on the poor, it is easy to be enthusiastic. He said many noble things. Certainly he was interested and most benevolently disposed towards them. Then, too, he

¹Found in first edition pamphlet 1834.
 "Sermon and Charge at the Ordination of Messers. Barnard and Gray, pp. 45-46. Also found in "On Preaching the Gospel to the Poor", Works, 1883 Edit., pp. 90-91.

was motivated by a sublime conviction of the infinite worth of man. It is, also, easy to condemn him. There are times when one wonders if he isn't just being platitudinous. One often suspects Channing of being more occupied with his principles than with their implications. To understand Channing's position is most difficult. He always had to go through an involved process of weighing one side against the other and then playing a little safe in his conclusions. He was conservative by nature and for anyone thus inclined it is most difficult to be really constructive in approaching the problems of the poor. A man may be most sincere in his benevolent disposition and eloquent in his sympathy and encouragement and yet leave their lot unchanged. Channing's propensity towards conservatism reveals itself in what he definitely opposed. He said that the people are not to be elevated by pressing into a different rank. But any man who really improves himself cannot be content with his outgrown method of living. The American system of which Channing heartily approved makes it possible for even the lowliest to rise to distinction. It has frequently happened that men who had the humblest start in life, reached the top. Channing's position

here seems out of accord with the American idea of equal opportunity for all. He seems to be making impossible the very thing he advocates by removing one of the main incentives. Most laborers must subsist on poverty wages. To have a kindly pastor of a wealthy church tell them they should strive for self-improvement but at the same time remain in their own class is inconsistent no matter how convincingly or piously it may be said. Channing said that he did not mean by self-improvement that the laborers should unite their votes to triumph over the prosperous, nor should they resort to politics. One feels that Channing is opposing just the thing he should have advocated. The only way to achieve social and economic legislation is through organization. Vested interests, under the duress of competition, are not inclined to do any more for workers than the law demands. No doubt Channing would have disparaged labor unions, a labor party and the sit down strike, and yet such steps count most in terms of actual improvement in the lot of the laboring man's life.

There is this to be said that Channing did strike at the superficialities of luxurious living and did condemn politics on moral grounds. That Channing did not propose anything revolutionizing to the

established system of his time; that his view was typically one of a protected individual, accepting the poor as inevitable, and offering them his charity and sympathy, should not blind us to the fact that what he said was better than nothing at all. In his day, social teachings were but gropings in darkness. To speak at all was to manifest real courage. This Channing did and he started at the right end, stating the worth of every individual, his right to self-culture in religious and social aspects. The fact that social leaders, drawing their inspiration from the same religious teachings regarding man's worth as a moral and spiritual being, have given stress to some of the things Channing opposed is not a negation of his religious principles but due to them. Channing's views of man's worth as more important than property will not lack for converts who will see to it that his teachings are practically embodied in legislation that the benefits thereof may be extended unto the least, the last and the lost of humanity. I started this summary by pointing out the ease of either a commending or condemning attitude towards Channing. I have held both attitudes during my study of his views on the poor. I close on a more appreciative note. Certainly, the young America

of the early 19th. century needed such doctrines as Channing proclaimed, emphasized and driven home. Undreamed of progress and material achievement lay ahead. The great industrial expansion of a machine age, and influences of economic and industrial realism were to bring overwhelming temptations to sacrifice the spirit and disregard the worth of human life. A century later, having experienced a world depression in which we have seen so many material values swept away, we find that Channing's principles have stood the test of time and constitute a firm foundation upon which we can safely build.

CHAPTER XLV

CONCLUSION

"....to learn what a man is, it is not enough to dissect his mind, and see separately the thoughts and feelings which successively possess him. The question is, what thoughts and feelings predominate, stand out most distinctly, and give a hue and impulse to the common actions of his mind? What are his great ideas? These form the man, and by their truth and dignity he is very much to be judged."¹

Channing was a happy combination of the spiritual and the intellectual. He was not an extremist and his careful, analytical thinking found expression in principles which not only profoundly influenced his time but were of permanent, practical value.

In the first place, Channing exemplified the power of the religious motive. With the simplicity and freshness of a springtime faith he envisioned the reality of a new world and the means of its redemption. Religion was the fountain which motivated his hope and energy and sustained his vision. His great humanitarian efforts were rooted in the religious motive. They were inspired by his views of the disinterested benevolence of God, the perfectibility

¹William Ellery Channing, "Introductory Remarks", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 1.

of human nature, and the trustworthiness of man's rational powers.

An outstanding characteristic of Channing was his liberal attitude. It was this predominant trait which lifted him to a reluctant leadership in the Unitarian revolt. Once he had led the liberal movement out into the open, he let it take its course. The controversy which waged for a decade after his Baltimore sermon, he left to other men. When the conservative¹ professors of Andover took up the cudgels in defense of the Trinity, the Atonement and the authority of the Scriptures, the answer came, not from Channing, but from the liberals² of Harvard. Once Channing had given expression to the faith of the new age, the ultimate triumph of the liberal spirit was inevitable. The hypocrisy of trying to be orthodox Calvinists on Sunday and 18th. century rationalists during the week had been exposed. An orthodoxy which had degenerated into a mere Bibliolatry, and doctrines which were but hopeless metaphysical subtleties were already breathing their last sulphurous breath when Channing administered the dispatching stroke. Though the body was not

¹Leonard Woods, Moses Stuart.

²Henry Ware, Andrews Norton.

pronounced dead for some time, the spirit at least was free. The reincarnation of this free spirit in new forms of thought and culture was amazing. Channing had expressed the very essence of the American temper in its quest for liberty and progress. The day of enlightenment had dawned. It was the dawn, really, of a half-century of quickened intellectual and cultural activity, flowering in New England Transcendentalism. In Channing the alliance of Unitarianism and secular humanitarianism was completed, thus he saved the day for liberal religious thinking and made it the impulse and guide of the social mind.

In a sermon in 1828, Channing unconsciously expressed the motivating principle of New England Transcendentalism.

"Whence do we derive our knowledge of the attributes and perfections which constitute the Supreme Being? I answer, we derive them from our own souls. The divine attributes are first developed in ourselves, and thence transferred to our Creator. The idea of God, sublime and awful as it is, is the idea of our own spiritual nature, purified and enlarged to infinity. In ourselves are the elements of the Divinity."¹

The transcendental ideas of Emerson are rooted in Channing's principles of spiritual freedom and human worth. However, Channing started with this

¹"Likeness to God", Works, 1883 Edit., p. 293.

visible world of men and things and sought to elevate it, whereas Emerson's *modus vivendi* was in another world which men distrusted because they could not understand. The romantic philosophy of the Transcendentalists was influenced by the social utopianism of revolutionary France and the idealistic metaphysics of the Teutonic Renaissance. These influences were evident in Channing's social views. The affinity of his teaching with Transcendentalism is seen in their mutual agreement against militarism and for temperance, prison reform and the repeal of harsh debtor laws.

Channing's teaching as to perfection was directed towards the elevation of humanity by the education and unfolding of man's moral powers. A more extreme development of Channing's position in this matter was evidenced in a movement initiated by John Humphrey Noyes, a Vermont Mystic. This movement was known as the Oneida Community. It was an experiment in complete communism of living. Channing's application of his belief in the perfectibility of man was less visionary and radical than that of Noyes. Channing's religious teaching found expression in leavening reforms rather than in fanatical radicalisms.

So imbued was the second quarter of the 19th century with the theological and religious teachings of Channing that his spirit was reflected in its culture, literature and poetry. These lines by Emerson are the expression of Channing.

"So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
So near is God to man,
When Duty whispers low, Thou must,
The youth replies, I can."¹

Some truly great men have had the misfortune to be born before the world was ready for their leadership. This was not true of Channing. Liberalizing influences had long been at work in New England. Gloomy Edwardian tenets were repelling to the natural optimism and independent spirit of the new world. A sturdy, pioneering people could not be cowed by fear. They were ready for vital adventures of the soul. For them, Channing was a voice and a champion. He was the man for the hour.

Channing became the central spirit of liberalism. From then on, the liberal movement was a fact, having a united following and an influential leader. On the other hand, Calvinism, as a vital force, lost its grip on the life of New England.

¹Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Voluntaries", 111, The Chief American Poets, 1905 Edit., pp. 99-100.

The value of Channing's liberalism to theological thinking in America cannot be overestimated. He struck the keynote of all human progress; the confidence in the ability of the mind to comprehend great principles and a desire to acquire such knowledge. The need of the liberal spirit today was recently emphasized, "What Channing, Emerson, Parker,....did for their generations must be done anew for ours, but their formulas will not serve to meet our needs."¹

Channing's views of the benevolence of God and the inherent goodness of man were, in large part, the result of the excesses of New England Calvinism. This reaction began in his childhood. He rejected all doctrines which were out of line with the perfect rectitude and benevolent character of God. He could not find the doctrine of the Trinity taught in the Scriptures and so rejected it on the ground that it was irrational and unscriptural. Reason, with Channing was a most important instrument. It was not only his approach to but also his confirmation of all doctrines. Scriptural revelations must first of all be rational. Channing's view of the Bible was that it contained rather than was a revelation. One feels that Channing

¹The Report of the Commission of Appraisal to the American Unitarian Association, "Unitarians Face a New Age", p. 3.

placed too much faith in the powers of the reason. Too often, it is to be feared, he went to the Scriptures seeking only the confirmation of preconceived opinions. However, Channing did much to free the mind of his day of gloomy views which had been invested with a Scriptural authority. It is interesting to note that Channing labored as strenuously against those who he believed had falsely used their rational powers in doctrinal formulation, as he did to further the free use of those powers. Though Channing thus exalted the divine logos in man as the arbiter of human piety, he did not seem to be conscious of the next step which was to be taken by Parker in America and Martineau in England, namely, the rejection of the authority of Scripture and tradition and the supernatural nature of Jesus. It is just here that an important distinction between what one might term Channing Unitarianism and the Unitarianism after Channing, should be noted. Though Channing enthroned the reason as the monitor of piety, he still held to a belief in revelation, confirmed by nature and the superhuman nature of Jesus.

Channing's faith, then, was not simple Unitarianism; he disclaimed any creed or denomination. He held to the great truths of Christianity; his mind revolted

only against such teaching as degraded the supreme and perfect God, and the sublimity of man's potential perfection. Reason, he believed, would be its own safeguard against the counterfeit or the merely emotional and false in religion. Channing would have been the last to approach God's presence in the pride of his own merit alone.

Channing thought of Christ, his words and deeds, as the supreme revelation of God and ranked Jesus as the highest of God's created beings. Jesus, in his humility, purity of heart, forgiveness and purity of character is an example which we have the power to imitate. Thus, he invited men to seek piety on the basis of the humanity of Jesus. Channing is always vague on the matter of the divinity of Christ. He was usually silent on matters which he could not positively verify. He objected to the divinity of Christ on the grounds that he could not find it taught in the Scriptures and that it detracted from the glory of the Father. That God required an infinite atonement, he wholly denied, as being inconsistent with the character of God.

Channing had noble views of man's worth as a moral being capable of infinite development. His sublime idea was that of the greatness of the soul.

One has the feeling that Channing's optimism as to the intrinsic worth of man was too strongly based on man's potentialities rather than on the realities of human nature. When we consider the constitutional weaknesses of man's nature, his ignorance, his proneness to anger, envy, and pride, for example, we question the justification of his confidence. One cannot help pointing out that the overconfidence, he condemned in his opponents was not entirely absent from his own thinking. In this connection the words of Dr. Hugh R. Mackintosh, spoken shortly before his death reveal a deep insight. He said, "When a man is about to die, his attitude is not that of his own worthiness in the sight of God but rather the humble sense of his own unworthiness and need of God's grace."

Summing up Channing's theological views we find that he constantly reiterated his main principles, namely, the benevolent character and perfection of God, the perfectibility of human nature and the trustworthiness of reason. He rendered a valuable service in leading men, lost in a tangle of confused and unworthy views, to a clearer conception of God

and a more worthy view of themselves.

Channing regarded religion as the soul's most natural and characteristic trait. The religious principle in human nature finds its inspiration and goal in the imitation of God's perfections, his wisdom, justice and benevolence. Channing's philanthropic activities and social reforms were the practical application of his religious convictions. which were rooted in the Scriptural teachings of God's fatherhood and man's brotherhood. Thus his teachings for peace and against war were motivated by his views that men should love one another and that war degrades and destroys their noble worth and natures. Channing's remedies for war too much presuppose the supremacy of spiritual influences as being already attained. Such optimism has been utterly disproved by the events of the past century. A smaller world has brought more clearly to us the economic and competitive factors which must first be Christianized. However Channing's vivid portrayal of the evils of war, its false glory, his condemnation of military parades and the type of courage generated by conflict, gave impetus and courage to the peace cause. Channing did not espouse the cause of nonresistance. However, his sermon against the war of 1812, which he condemned

as unjust, and counselled the nonparticipation of patriotic citizens, was a courageous position in view of the general opinions of his day. Considered in the light of his time, Channing's efforts in behalf of peace must be ranked as valuable contributions to the clearing away of confusing issues which is an important step in the attainment of good will and ultimately a peaceful world.

Channing's endeavors in behalf of the poor and the cause of temperance flowed as a natural course from his views of man's worth and the importance of his rational nature. He considered intemperance the voluntary extinction of man's reasoning powers and his portrayal of the degrading consequences of drunkenness was a challenge to men to be true to their noble natures. His conviction that temperance must come by the educational method has been fully vindicated by the sad outcome of various measures during the past century, notably the American experiment to attain temperance by prohibitory legislation.

The same principle of love for man as an individual of infinite worth and a desire that all men should possess the highest possible degree of spiritual freedom permeates all of Channing's efforts

to elevate the poor and laboring classes. He considered each man important as an individual personality, never as a mere means to an end. His efforts to uplift the individual through moral and spiritual influences and to furnish him the means of self-culture are fundamental and moving expressions of practical reforms. Channing is far better in this field than in the realm of positive, constructive measures for the improvement of the laboring classes or conditions under which they labor. Here Channing is more the beginning in the right direction at a time when the application of the social principles of the Christian gospel were not clearly envisioned.

Nothing cost Channing a greater price than the position he so courageously took on the issue of slavery. It brought him criticism from both antislavery men and those who approved of slaveholding. Channing had regarded slavery as a degrading institution from boyhood. It occupied his mature thoughts and when, at last, in 1835, he gave public expression to his views, they were unshakable convictions, in full accord with his principles of the right of all men to spiritual freedom and the full expansion of their nature and powers. The

closing years of his ministry found him giving his energy and prestige in shaping public opinion against slavery. His last public address was a sublime expression of that sentiment. No force, outside that of the Civil War, did more in behalf of the slave than Channing's work through the medium of the pulpit and pen. No doubt had Channing's methods been the means of gaining the slave his freedom, the Negro's position today in the South would be a much truer freedom than it is.

The theological and religious teachings of Channing are worthy of serious study by all who seek to advance the principles of truth, humanity and spiritual freedom. His teachings are a prophecy of a world, as yet unrealized, which must be built upon the eternal values of human character and the goodness of God. The noble example and spirit of Channing are a challenge to make this world a better place for the unfolding of the divine in us.

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